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ABSTRACT

SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE) is one of the federally funded regional educational laboratories. This annual publication captures and shares the experiences of SERVE school districts that have volunteered to share their efforts at assessment reform. This issue contains the following articles: (1) "Classroom Assessment: A Driving Force To Improve Learning. SERVE's Perspective" (Nancy McMunn); (2) "Encouraging Discussions about Classroom Assessment at the School Level. A North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Initiative. The State Perspective" (Jeane Joyner and Jan Williamson); (3) "Building Teacher Assessment Capacity: One District's Story, Marks, Mississippi. The District Perspective" (Linda Brooks); (4) "Alcorn School District: Lessons Learned about Improving Assessment Capacity" (Tim Cannon and Sandy Gibson); (5) "Spotlight on Assessment in Early Childhood" (Glyn Brown); (6) "A Creative Movement/Mathematics Project at Bugg Elementary School" (Mary Q. Penta and Joan Certa-Moore); (7) "The Senior Project Experience at Polk County High School, North Carolina: A School-Level Assessment Project To Improve Learning. A High School Perspective" (Buck Preston); and (8) "A Practical Classroom Assessment Course for Higher Education: Developing a Performance-Based Course on Assessment for Use in Higher Education. An Institution of Higher Education Perspective" (Susan Butler and Nancy McMunn). Included with this publication is a booklet, "A Self-Diagnostic Growth Plan for Classroom Assessment Fall 2000 Draft" by Nancy McMunn. (SLD)

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Assessment Hotspots

Volume 2, Number 1

Annual Magazine

ED 457 197

Classroom Assessments: A Driving Force to Improve Learning

Encouraging Discussions about Classroom Assessment

Building Teacher Assessment Capacity

Lessons Learned about Improving Assessment Capacity

Spotlight on Assessment in Early Childhood

A Creative Movement/ Mathematics Project at Bugg Elementary

A High School Assessment Project to Improve Learning

A Practical Classroom Assessment Course for Higher Education

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SERVE

Improving Learning through Research & Development

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Classroom Assessment: A Driving Force to Improve Learning

Classroom assessment is an ongoing process for continuous improvement that emphasizes learning for both students and teachers. But what does it mean for a teacher to be a "good" assessor? SERVE is trying to help teachers answer this question. This article describes efforts to define quality classroom assessment practices. The identified dimensions of "good" classroom assessment are presented as a self-assessment for use at the classroom or school level to help educators target areas needing attention.

9 **The State Perspective**
Encouraging Discussions about Classroom Assessment at the School Level

Many teachers only use classroom tests that are modeled after state assessments. In response, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction produced a manual on *Classroom Assessment: Linking Instruction and Assessment* and an accompanying study guide to help educators understand that the "strategies most likely to result in long-term growth and learning of high quality will result from effective use of quality classroom assessments as an integral part of instruction." In this article, the authors, Jeane Joyner and Jan Williamson, discuss efforts to disseminate these materials on classroom assessment to principals throughout the state.

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Building Teacher Assessment Capacity

The Assessment, Accountability, and Standards program at SERVE has worked closely with nine districts interested in building teacher assessment capacity—specifically related to classroom assessment. This article describes the experiences of one Mississippi district in improving teacher assessment capacity.

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Alcorn School District: Lessons Learned about Improving Assessment Capacity

The Alcorn School District in Corinth, Mississippi, has been a SERVE demonstration site for four years. Rienzi and Biggersville Elementary Schools were the initial schools involved in intensive training on assessment. Rienzi and Biggersville educators share their experiences.

25 **Early Childhood Perspective**
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This article provides an overview of the issue of school readiness assessment and describes an upcoming SERVE study on this topic.

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The article describes how an integrated performance assessment was created and implemented with students at one of North Carolina's A+ schools, Bugg Elementary School.

33 **A High School Perspective**
A School-Level Assessment Project to Improve Learning

Polk County High School has implemented a requirement that all seniors participate in a Senior Project experience as part of their English IV class. The Senior Project in Polk County has become a celebration at the end of each semester for the school and community. This article describes the start up and success of Senior Project at Polk County High School.

40 **A Higher Education Perspective**
A Practical Classroom Assessment Course for Higher Education

This article describes a new course on classroom assessment developed by Dr. Susan Butler at North Carolina State University with help from SERVE. The course has been field tested, and a learner's handbook and instructor's manual are currently being written to outline coursework and make the course suitable for any institution of higher education. The course materials will be available soon. Check the SERVE website, *www.serve.org/assessment/*, for dissemination information.

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Assessment HotSpots, produced through the efforts of SERVE's Assessment, Accountability, and Standards program, features the work of educators in the Southeast and will be available on SERVE's website, *www.serve.org*. For information on articles in this publication, contact Nancy McMunn at SERVE (*nmcmunn@serve.org*).

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About the SERVE

SERVE, directed by Dr. John R. Sanders, is an education organization with the mission to promote and support the continuous improvement of educational opportunities for all learners in the Southeast. The organization's commitment to continuous improvement is manifest in a cycle that begins with research and best practice. Building on theory and craft knowledge, SERVE staff develop tools and processes designed to assist practitioners, to refine the organization's delivery of technical-assistance to schools and educational agencies, and, ultimately, to raise the level of student achievement in the region. Evaluation of the impact of these activities combined with input from affected stakeholders expands SERVE's knowledge base and directs future research.

This critical research-to-practice cycle is supported by an experienced staff strategically located throughout the region. This staff is highly skilled in providing needs-assessment services, conducting applied research in schools, and developing processes, products, and programs that inform educators and increase student achievement. In the last three years, SERVE staff members have provided technical assistance and training to more than 18,000 teachers and administrators across the region and partnered with over 170 southeastern schools on research and development projects.

SERVE is governed by a board of directors that includes the governors, chief state school officers, educators, legislators, and private sector leaders from Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

At SERVE's core is the Regional Educational Laboratory program. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement, SERVE is one of ten organizations providing services of the Regional Educational Laboratory program to all 50 states and territories. These Laboratories form a knowledge network, building a bank of information and resources shared nationally and disseminated regionally to improve student achievement locally. Besides the Lab, SERVE is the lead agency in the Southeast Eisenhower Regional Consortium for Mathematics and Science Education and the Southeast Initiatives Regional Technology in Education Consortium. SERVE also administers a subcontract for the Region IV Comprehensive Center and has additional funding from the Department to provide services in migrant education and to operate the National Center for Homeless Education.

Based on these funded efforts, SERVE has developed a portfolio of programs and initiatives that provides a spectrum of resources, services, and products for responding to local, regional,

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Organization

and national needs. Program areas include Assessment, Accountability, and Standards; Children, Families, and Communities; Education Policy; Improvement of Science and Mathematics Education; Education Leadership; School Development and Reform; and Technology in Learning.

In addition to the program areas, the SERVE Evaluation Department supports the evaluation activities of the major grants and contracts and provides evaluation services to state and local education agencies in the region. The Technology Support Group provides SERVE staff and their constituents with systems, technical assistance, and software applications. Through its Communications and Publications Department, SERVE publishes a variety of studies, training materials, policy briefs, and program products. Through its programmatic, technology support, evaluation, and publishing activities, SERVE also provides contracted staff development and technical assistance in many areas of expertise to assist education agencies in achieving their school improvement goals.

SERVE's main office is at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, with major staff groups located in Tallahassee, Florida, and Atlanta, Georgia. Unique among the ten Regional Educational Laboratories, SERVE maintains policy analysts at the state education agencies of each of the states in its region. These analysts act as SERVE's primary liaisons to the state departments of education, providing research-based policy services to state-level education policymakers and informing SERVE about key educational issues and legislation.

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"To begin with the end in mind means to start with a clear understanding of your destination. It means to know where you are going so that you better understand where you are now so that the steps you take are always in the right direction."

–Steven R. Covey
The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People

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Overview of Publication

SERVE, as one of the ten federally funded regional educational laboratories, disseminates research-based knowledge that will help schools improve. But there are at least two kinds of knowledge to share. One kind is the typical, university-based, social science research. The other kind is craft or practitioner knowledge (educators writing about what they have done and what they have learned from what they have tried). This publication honors this second kind of knowledge. In it, we have asked educators who are involved in assessment reform at the district, school, and classroom level to share their experiences.

The need for assessment reform is twofold. Most states have revised their Curriculum Frameworks or State Standards Documents to reflect emerging national standards. For these new standards to be implemented in the classroom, teachers need opportunities to develop assessments that align with these standards. Secondly, student motivation is increasingly recognized as a key educational outcome. Traditional tests do not consistently engage students as active and intrinsically motivated learners. Assessment is increasingly seen as needing to be relevant to the real world and involve the student in a meaningful self-assessment process. If students are assigned "quality" work to do, they will more likely become quality workers and thinkers.

SERVE has an ongoing research and development project that supports volunteer demonstration districts in the process of assessment reform; SERVE also supports and values the assessment work of others in the region. The primary purpose of this publication, ***Assessment HotSpots***, is to periodically capture and share the experiences and learning of these districts and others. As other districts read about their experiences, they may realize that focusing on assessment changes at the district level can be a meaningful tool and driving force in the restructuring process.

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SERVE's Perspective

Classroom Assessment: A Driving Force to Improve Learning

By Nancy McMunn, SERVE

During the last four years, SERVE has collaborated with a number of districts in the Southeast to create district-wide professional development support systems for teachers as they explore how to assess student performance on critical learning targets (standards) at the school and classroom level. Since our southeastern states had all revised or developed their curriculum frameworks (student content standards) in the mid-1990s, SERVE focused on helping teachers understand the role assessment plays in the classroom so that teachers would know how to align the standards (referred to as *learning targets* in some states) to assessments that would inform student learning related to the skill, concept, or knowledge addressed by the standard. With the learning target and assessment method specified, the type of instruction necessary to support student learning can be designed and implemented to create a powerful learning process.

Teacher perception that classroom assessments must mimic state tests is a significant barrier when trying to help teachers explore assessment strategies that might lead to higher quality student work and greater motivation to learn. Due to external pressures, many teachers consider alternative methods of assessments to be add-on activities, which create extra work for them. Because of concerns about preparing

Broadly defined, classroom assessment is an ongoing process through which teachers and students interact to promote greater learning. The assessment process involves using a range of strategies to make decisions regarding instruction and gathering information about student performance or behavior in order to diagnose students' problems, monitor their progress, and give feedback for improvement. The classroom assessment process also involves using multiple methods of obtaining student information through a variety of assessment strategies such as written tests, interviews, observations, and performance tasks.

See the *Self-Diagnostic Growth Plan on Classroom Assessment* inserted in this magazine.

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction supports the continued development of quality teaching and classroom assessment as vehicles to prepare students to master rigorous content and performance standards as well as do well on accountability measures. We believe that the strategies most likely to result in long-term growth and learning of high quality will result from effective use of quality classroom assessments as an integral part of instruction. Additionally, strong classroom assessment engages students in self-assessment and greater ownership over learning. (From *Classroom Assessment: Linking Instruction and Assessment*)

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students for state tests, teachers often say they cannot consider alternative assessments, which offer opportunities for students to work on "real-life" problems. Teachers report that they cannot afford to spend two or three weeks on special units or projects because these assignments take too much time away from preparing for state tests. Some abandon alternative assessment methods such as portfolios, extended projects, written research, oral presentations, performance tasks, teamwork, or exhibitions in order to repetitively cover the tested material and to help students develop test-taking skills.

The excerpt below from a high school English teacher shows that this problem of narrowing instruction to improve test scores is not unique to our country.

In the summer of 1998, I spent several weeks in China teaching oral English skills to Chinese English teachers. The class they loved most was the methodology class, where I taught them many different ways to open up and practice speaking English rather than just writing translations from Chinese to English. While many Chinese students can read and write English, very few can fluently speak the language, and a language that cannot be spoken is rarely beneficial in today's world. Recently, I received a letter from one teacher who responded to my inquiry as to how the oral exercises were going. "Oh, my dear Mrs. Thompson," she replied, "I must tell you that the Chinese national exam has no oral English part, and as I must prepare my students for this important test, I do not use the oral exercises in my classroom. However, should they add an oral component to the test, I will use your ideas."

Narrowing the curriculum is an unintended consequence of high-stakes testing, and some state, district, and school leaders in our region are doing what they can to help teachers interpret the demands of high-stakes tests in ways that do not short-change students.

Leadership in schools and districts is critical to expanding the use of classroom assessment practices that promote learning. An example of how leaders can help define what quality classroom assessment should look like is currently being developed and piloted in one of SERVE's research and development sites, Bay District Schools in Florida. In addition to sustained, focused workshops on curriculum alignment and classroom assessment, the district has developed draft guidelines that provide teachers and others with a vision of quality classroom assessment.

Bay District has outlined the following specific goals for classroom assessment:

1. The primary purpose of assessment is to improve learning for all students.
2. Assessment is aligned to standards.
3. Assessment is a process that is reflective of quality.
4. Grading is fair, consistent, and meaningful.
5. Communication with stakeholders is timely, appropriate to the audience, and aligned to standards.
6. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, communicated, and understood by all stakeholders.

Each goal is further subdivided into principles that explain why the goal is valued and guidelines that explain how the goal would be implemented. For example, under Goal 4 are three principles and ten guidelines. Goal 4, Guideline 4.2 states that teachers inform students about grading

If you would like more information about the process of developing district assessment guidelines, contact Patricia Schenck, Bay District Schools, Panama City, Florida, *schenpm@mail.bay.k12.fl.us*; Ken O'Connor, Assess for Success Consulting, *kenoc@aol.com*; or Nancy McMunn at SERVE, *nmcmunn@serve.org*.

criteria and methods used for determining grades. This guideline states that every teacher in this district will have in place some process through which all students are informed in advance how they are to be graded as well as how the final grade will be determined. These guidelines are intended to provide a common language for best practices in classroom assessment.

Providing Guidance for Best Practices in Classroom Assessment

Helping educators understand the impact of the classroom assessment environment on students is the purpose of SERVE's assessment work. We strongly promote assessment as an integral part of the whole—where curriculum, instruction, and assessment are considered together when planning. We ask questions that help educators rethink the link between classroom assessment practices and student performance on high-stakes assessment. In order to ask questions, SERVE must try to present a vision of what "good" assessment means in the classroom. As a first step, we have developed a tool to aid educators in self-assessing and determining areas of needed growth and professional development in assessment.

Based on workshops conducted with more than 3,000 participants, SERVE has developed a draft version of a Self-Diagnostic Growth Plan on Classroom Assessment, included as an insert (inside the back cover of this magazine). Teachers and others can use this tool, which incorporates ideas from research and practice, to examine and reflect upon their current classroom assessment environment.

If classroom assessment is used as a driving force for improving student learning, then educators must understand which key assessment areas or components (dimensions) are important aspects of that environment. Once major areas (dimensions) are identified, key indicators for each assessment area can then guide thinking about beliefs, assumptions, or practices that support a quality classroom assessment environment.

The dimensions identified in this guide come from research, SERVE's work with teachers, and the influential thinking of national and international experts such as Robert Marzano, Rick Stiggins, Judy Arter, Ken O'Connor, Grant Wiggins, and others. It can serve as a beginning—a self-diagnostic tool that will help teachers explore and test the assumptions that these kinds of assessment practices increase students' quality of work and motivation to succeed. Thus, by examining the dimensions on the growth plan, teachers have an opportunity to think about the type of classroom assessment environment and strategies they promote and use. This plan can also help professional developers focus on the type of training needed in classroom assessment.

The nine dimensions (areas of classroom assessment focus) included in the growth plan are posed as the following questions:

1. What is the role of classroom assessment?
2. Are the targets/standards for learning a priority?
3. What are the purposes for assessment?
4. Which assessment methods are used?
5. How is assessment feedback used?
6. What are "quality assessment" considerations?
7. Is continuous learning a priority?
8. Is grading reflective of learning?
9. How is achievement communicated?

Teachers can use this resource to set individual goals in classroom assessment around specific dimensions. A teacher might ask—*Where am I in understanding the assessment process? What do I need to consider changing that will influence how my students learn?* Grade-level or school groups can hold dialogue or study-group sessions to explore and discuss their own practices and note areas needing change.

We welcome feedback on the usefulness of this growth plan and any suggestions for change in the format, style, dimensions, and indicators. Please send feedback about this growth plan to Nancy McMunn at SERVE, 800-755-3277 or *nmcmunn@serve.org*.

The State Perspective

What's Happening at the State Level? Spotlight on North Carolina

Encouraging Discussions about Classroom Assessment at the School Level: A North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Initiative

By Jeane Joyner and Jan Williamson

In 1998, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction began a statewide initiative focusing on classroom assessment. The classroom assessment initiative was offered by the state department but not mandated. The intent was to provide an opportunity for every school in the state to begin discussions about classroom assessment through materials disseminated in workshops for principals and lead teachers. School faculties chose whether to participate, how they wanted to structure their participation, and in which ways they would proceed with their own professional development around classroom assessment.

The initiative, Encouraging Discussions about Classroom Assessment at the School Level, has two primary goals:

1. To promote "assessment literacy" by informing educators, policymakers, and the community at large about the different purposes of assessment
2. To increase student achievement in North Carolina by helping teachers understand and effectively use ongoing classroom assessment to inform teaching and learning

Assessment has multiple purposes and uses, and the issues surrounding it are complex. Understanding this complicated area is important for principals and teachers in today's assessment-driven environment. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction framed the initiative around enhancing "assessment literacy." By building a common language and

establishing shared understandings, conversations among the education community, parents, and policymakers are likely to be supportive of student learning.

With the advent of higher levels of accountability through state tests given at the end of courses or grade levels, North Carolina teachers are feeling greater pressure to "practice for the test." The classroom assessment literacy initiative encourages schools to frame the issue more broadly. The initiative provides information that encourages teachers to approach classroom assessment by building a strong instructional and assessment program that supports long-term learning while resulting in high achievement on state tests. In the materials, ongoing classroom assessment is presented as the umbrella concept for a number of strategies supporting the goal of continuous progress for all students.

Effective classroom teachers have always used formal and informal assessments to guide their planning and give appropriate feedback to students about their progress toward instructional goals. However, teachers may not recognize the potential of using multiple methods of assessment to gather information about what students are understanding and thinking (for diagnostic and formative purposes), as well as what they are able to do (for summative or grading purposes). The assessment literacy materials offer an opportunity to examine different assessment strategies and purposes.

Planning the Initiative

This initiative began when a committee with representatives of all agency departments—Accountability Services, Instructional Services, School Improvement, and Exceptional Children—was established. Committee members conducted focus groups across the state to gather information on teacher awareness of, interest in, and need for classroom assessment materials. Several clear messages emerged. One teacher summarized her anxieties in this way:

> *Unfortunately, teachers and administrators are feeling a great push to practice all year long for the state tests. While I support the idea of school accountability, I think conscientious teachers recognize the need for multiple assessment formats in the classroom. But the panic effect has taken hold in many places. We need a way to support teachers with some practical, user-friendly classroom assessment practices.*

A second message was the need for more discussion about the purposes of accountability testing and the appropriate uses of test data. No single test can meet all assessment needs. Teachers need specific information about individual children to plan appropriately, while school systems use group data for decisions at a system level.

The third message related to leadership. Teachers made it clear that if a broader range of assessment practices were to be used in their classrooms, principals must understand and actively support these strategies. Teachers were concerned about lack of time to try new assessments and to document assessment through observations and conversations. They emphasized that the principal's leadership was necessary in order for a substantive and sustained initiative on classroom assessment to take place at the school.

Using the information from the focus groups, the committee created an outline for classroom assessment documents and their dissemination, established a teacher advisory committee, and met with Dr. Rick Stiggins, a consultant from the Classroom Assessment Institute in Portland, Oregon, to bring a national perspective to the initiative.

Development of the Initiative

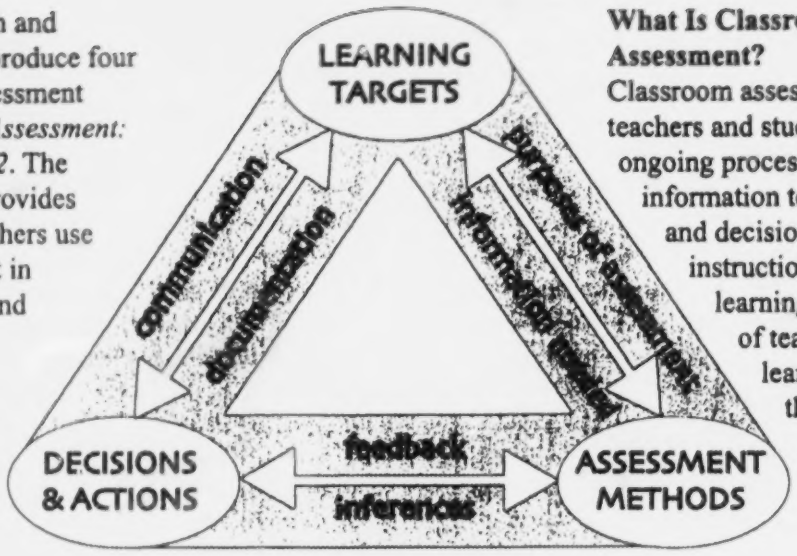
State department staff members Jeane Joyner and Jan Williamson, with the assistance of the committee, developed a manual entitled *Classroom Assessment: Linking Curriculum and Instruction*, which was designed to promote assessment literacy. It is appropriate for all grade levels and disciplines. The model described later in this article, "Assessment Cycle: A Model for Teaching and Learning," is the essence of this document. Joyner and Williamson obtained special permission from the

Annenberg/CPB Math and Science Project to reproduce four segments of their assessment series, *Mathematics Assessment: A Video Library, K–12*. The resulting videotape provides examples of how teachers use classroom assessment in elementary, middle, and high school classes.

A *Study Guide* was also developed in collaboration with Nancy McMunn of SERVE. This study guide provides activities and scaffolding for teachers to work their way through the classroom assessment manual. Additionally, the state office is providing an opportunity for teachers to receive renewal credit for licensure while they work in self-directed study groups, which promote reflective collaboration utilizing the *Study Guide*. As one teacher commented, "I love the idea of self-study and buddy-study. Teachers have a wealth of knowledge to share. Plus, I think working together would be much more motivating and stimulating." (The American Educational Research Association, AERA, awarded this *Study Guide* the 1999 Outstanding Publication Award in the Training Materials Category for Division H.)

Since January 1999, the classroom assessment materials have been disseminated through a series of workshops for administrators and school leaders. Each school in North Carolina was provided an opportunity to send a principal and one lead teacher to a workshop presenting an overview of the materials. Each participating school receives a notebook with the *Classroom Assessment: Linking Curriculum and Instruction* manual, a copy of the *Study Guide*, the videotape, and a packet entitled "Workshop Leaders' Notes." "Workshop Leaders' Notes" gives directions for presenting a workshop to introduce the classroom assessment materials to school faculties. Copies of blackline masters are also included.

Agency plans call for future publications that will address classroom assessment targeted specifically for elementary, middle, and high schools in each curriculum content area. The model of assessment above illustrates the essential components of the cycle of instruction and assessment presented in the materials described here.



Cycle of Classroom Assessment

What Is Classroom Assessment?

Classroom assessment involves teachers and students in an ongoing process of gathering information to make inferences and decisions related to instruction and student learning. A strong model of teaching and learning involves the following cycle of classroom assessment.

"Assessment" comes from a root word meaning "to sit beside."

The three components of the assessment process (learning targets, decisions and actions, and assessment methods) appear in the ovals of the diagram above. The actions shown along the connecting arrows link the components in a dynamic manner. A brief description of each component is provided here, along with an overview of how the model plays out in the classroom.

Learning Targets

Learning targets, which are the goals and objectives of our instructional programs, should drive all assessment decisions. Effective teachers possess a conceptual, in-depth understanding of the content they are teaching. Those teachers are able to identify which learning targets are most important and to establish priorities and categories of goals

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and objectives. They also decide how to break down those categories into clusters of manageable, appropriate instructional units. Most importantly, they clarify for themselves and for their students what those learning targets are and what mastery of them will look like.

Teachers incorporate many different types of learning targets into their lessons. At times, the goal is for students to learn a new concept or to gain specific content knowledge. Other lessons focus on the acquisition of skills. Many lessons are designed to develop students' reasoning and problem-solving abilities. Still other lessons are planned to help students learn to apply their knowledge and skills in order to create worthwhile products. All of these content-based lessons incorporate goals related to students' work habits. They also include goals related to positive attitudes toward learning the specific content (such as mathematics) and building self-confidence.

Purposes and Information Needed

Within the classroom, teachers and students are the primary users of assessment information. The most important purpose is to direct and inform student learning. Teachers need a full spectrum of information about each student's level of understanding and performance, and students need a thorough knowledge of their own levels of achievement. Teachers need more than one "snapshot" or piece of data; they need multiple evidences of learning that will allow diagnosing problems, monitoring progress, evaluating achievement, and deciding about future instruction—for each student!

It is important to define clearly the learning and achievement expectations for students. Students, as well as teachers, must have a clear idea of what they are expected to master and what success looks like. Assessment formats should reflect these expectations.

Assessment Methods

Assessment methods fall into five basic categories that teachers frequently use. Within the categories are several different methods. Each assessment method has advantages and disadvantages. Some are more appropriate and efficient for certain learning targets than others, but each method offers some type of evidence of student learning. The five different categories are

1. **Selected response** includes multiple choice, true/false, and matching items.
2. **Written response** includes short-answer, essay tests, and more extended written work, such as journals, reports from investigations, research papers, and book reviews.
3. **Performance** includes applications and student demonstrations of learning, such as oral presentations, projects, dramatic depictions, debates, and responses to complex, real-world performance tasks.
4. **Conversation** includes student explanations, student conferences, Socratic seminars, responses to open-ended questions, and informal discussions.
5. **Observation** includes both formal and informal looks at students at work.

Inferences and Feedback

The essence of assessment is information—the feedback teachers use to make inferences about student learning. As they gather the evidence, teachers ask reflective questions of themselves. For example, they may ask

- What do these errors actually tell me about the students' thinking and understanding?
- Do I have sufficient evidence to know how well the students really understand?
- How well can I generalize about how much students can do?
- What other evidence might I need?
- Based on this evidence I have, what should I do?

Information from assessment can also provide feedback to the students about what they have accomplished and what they still have to learn. Feedback to students takes many forms. It can be disseminated through scheduled conferences with students or informal conversations. It can be written on individual student's papers or given to the class as a whole. Feedback should often take the form of questions designed to prompt students to make decisions rather than giving them directives about what to do.

Making Decisions and Taking Action

In most classrooms today, teachers know a great deal about their students. They have accumulated a lot of information using a variety of assessment methods. Based on how they interpret this information (that is, the inferences they make), teachers may take any number of actions. They may decide, for example, to reteach, to move on, to regroup for further instruction, to reassess certain learning targets, or to assign a grade. The ultimate reason for assessing students is to make various types of decisions that relate to instructional goals and assessment purposes. The decisions made and actions taken can vary from knowing that an individual student or group of students has learned specific instructional objectives, to assigning grades to student work, to rewarding exemplary schools and initiating improvement for poorly performing ones.

Documenting and Communicating

Before teachers decide upon the next set of learning targets for students, they should document accurately and communicate clearly what students have achieved. While the process of communication and documentation is infused into all stages of the cycle of classroom assessment, it is particularly evident when teachers are ending one cycle of learning and beginning another.

Documenting student learning, which can be as simple as taking notes or keeping checklists, needs to be organized, systematic, and ongoing. It is a wise investment of time to decide in advance which information to record and how to record it.

Teachers who have developed record-keeping strategies have the following suggestions about ways to begin:

- Focus on a few children at a time.
- Focus on a few objectives at a time.
- Date your observations.
- Do not be too quick to give up on a method, but do not stick with it if it does not work!
- Find a fellow teacher with whom you can share the needs and successes of the students.
- Be quick to make notes of unexpected information, but be slow to decide that students have made new content their own.
- Find a method that fits you so that you do not have to recopy notes.
- Make quick notes during class rather than trusting that you will find time later.

Criteria for Quality Classroom Assessment

- Important and clear learning targets
- Appropriate methods of assessment
- Reasonable, reliable implementation methods
- Public criteria for achievement
- Fair opportunity for demonstrating learning
- Valid inferences (measuring what you intend to measure)
- Useful, constructive consequences

Final Thoughts

The classroom assessment initiative in North Carolina has just begun. Feedback from participants in workshops has been very positive. Many teachers find that the materials reinforce the assessment practices they are currently using. Other teachers have begun to explore ways to use assessment in their classrooms to improve student motivation and learning. An important feature of the initiative is that schools and individual teachers have multiple entry points. For example, some teachers are taking advantage of the *Study Guide* to learn on their own or in small groups. Ultimately, the goal is to support professional development in an often overlooked area that is key to student learning—student assessment.

Ordering information

Copies of *Classroom Assessment: Linking Instruction and Assessment* and the *Study Guide for Classroom Assessment* that accompanies the manual may be ordered from the Publications Office of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction <*http://149.168.35.203/publications_catalog*>. The order number for the classroom assessment manual is LS 111; the cost is $6.00 per copy. The *Study Guide* costs $3.00, and the order number is LS 112. Include 20% for shipping and handling and 6% for sales tax.

Building Teacher Assessment Capacity: One District's Story Marks, Mississippi

Article written and comments edited by Dr. Linda Brooks, SERVE Consultant in Assessment

Using a variety of quality assessments in my classroom has had a tremendous impact on students. Most importantly to the students, their scores on teacher-made and state-mandated tests have increased. This improvement has given the students more confidence, higher self-esteem, and a better attitude toward learning. They are more highly motivated to study and to participate in all activities; they feel that they have something to contribute and that their individual talents are appreciated. My students also like to be involved with their assessment and often give me ideas that I would never have thought of myself. They find the activities interesting and are more excited about coming to class.

— Judy Bland, Teacher, Quitman County

Quitman County demographics: 1,732 students, 93 teachers, nine administrators, one elementary school, one middle school, one high school

Superintendent: Leroy Matthews

Major industry: agriculture

Mississippi began its school reform process in 1980 and continues to research and experiment with ways to bring quality educational programs to its students. For the past 20 years, Mississippi schools have experienced many changes, explored several accountability systems, and experimented with a variety of curricula, materials, strategies, policies, and regulations. The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) has established a numerical accreditation system by which school districts are ranked according to student achievement scores on norm- and criterion-referenced tests administered to all students in certain grades and subjects. This system has been the driving force behind reform efforts of Mississippi schools for the past five years.

One reform effort has focused on Quitman County, a small agricultural community in the heart of the Mississippi Delta, which provides educational services for 1,732 students in three schools comprising the Quitman County Public School District (QCPSD). The district has a 99 percent minority enrollment. Against adversity, the district continues to wage a tremendous battle to increase student academic achievement. Quitman's challenges—including poverty, a low tax base, and an inability to recruit and retain certified teachers—are common in the school districts in the Delta region.

"The only way to be successful is to take advantage of every opportunity available."

— Leroy Matthews, Superintendent

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"One of our major goals is to teach individual students. When we look at student achievement, we must think of ways to improve that individual. By doing that, we will improve the school."

— Leroy Matthews, Superintendent

Quitman County Public School District stopped making excuses for its failures and decided to make positive changes to directly benefit students. Realizing that true improvement starts in the classroom, the district requested assistance from SERVE to help teachers acquire skills needed to improve student learning. The district realized that increasing teacher classroom assessment capacity could lead to changes in instruction and curriculum alignment and that these changes could have a direct impact on students. SERVE's Quality Assessment Training Model (QATM), utilized in other Delta districts, was selected as one tool for helping teachers improve their classroom assessment practices. In this job-embedded professional development model, teachers learned to focus on aligning instruction and assessment with student learning targets. Now three years into the process, while QCPSD still has a long way to go, it has been recognized as one of the ten most improved school districts in Mississippi.

First Steps

Several public school districts in the Mississippi Delta area, along with Delta State University as its hub and host, formed the Delta Area Association for Improvement of Schools Consortium (DAAIS). The primary focus of this consortium was to set into motion strategies to improve the educational programs of the districts. Dr. Myrtis Tabb, an Assistant Director at Delta State University, served as a liaison to unite SERVE and DAAIS Districts. Initially (in 1996), ten district teams (more than 85 participants) were involved with this professional development project. These ten districts were Quitman County, South Panola, West Bolivar District I, Tunica County, Indianola, Benoit, Hollandale, Leland, Humphreys County, and South Delta. Six of these districts remained with the SERVE project for two years. After two years of assessment training, the district participants began to create and implement their own district plans for increasing teacher assessment capacity. Quitman County requested more direct SERVE assistance. This article describes Quitman County's efforts and progress in building teacher assessment capacity and improving student achievement.

Professional Development in Classroom Assessment

In the fall of 1996, a small study team of six administrators and lead teachers from Quitman County participated along with ten other districts in the Delta Consortium Assessment Project sponsored by SERVE, DAAIS, and Delta State University staff. This team was convinced that student motivation and achievement could be improved if teachers learned to focus more on aligning curriculum, instruction, and classroom assessment.

Rufus McClain, the district test coordinator and team leader, kept the effort alive. McClain believes that all teachers and administrators should "put their hearts into teaching," and he has continued to promote and support the emphasis on quality classroom assessment as a vehicle for improving QCPSD. Since the beginning of this assessment project, 60 percent of the district's 93 teachers and all administrators have been trained in classroom assessment utilizing SERVE's QATM and other assessment resources. As a result of our efforts, many teachers are now finding that an emphasis on classroom assessment aligned to state and district targets provides them with a mechanism for focusing on what is important for students to know and be able to do. The ongoing training and support have given teachers freedom to be

Teacher Bedeliah Sweargen assists eighth-grade students with a self-evaluation writing assignment

creative in designing instructional and assessment strategies that motivate students to take more responsibility for learning.

A sixth-grade reading teacher shared her thoughts about the time, efforts, and rewards resulting from attention to assessment. According to Ann Goodman, "Creating alternative assessments can be time-consuming but worthwhile. Preparation time is important in developing an assessment instrument, and the district provides teachers with at least a half-day of staff development each month to devote to developing good instruction and assessment. Since teachers stay more focused and get more done in a shorter period of time, more time is available for student participation in the assessment process. The design of the assessment instruments then becomes a part of the learning process, rather than a part of the teacher preparation process. Also, we have found that when students know what kind of assessment they will face, they have more direction in class, cutting down on the interruptions for unrelated matters."

Progress Made

Quitman County School District leaders understand the importance of providing teachers with the tools and support to build quality programs. The climate has begun to change in the district because of the renewed commitment to teacher support. Teachers are gaining confidence and motivation since they have been given freedom and assistance in redesigning their classroom instructional and assessment programs. The Mississippi Assessment System scores indicate that something very positive has occurred in classrooms across the district—students have begun to gain academic proficiency. The number of students performing at the lower-quartile level on norm-referenced achievement tests has dropped dramatically, and students' reading and mathematics scores

"An assessment program has value to the extent that the use of data lead to better instruction, a more effective curriculum, and better educational planning. The purpose of measurement is to provide information that allows teachers and administrators to make better decisions."

—Dr. Robert Maniece, Curriculum Coordinator

"I constantly tell my teachers, 'Go ahead: experiment—be innovative; let's challenge the children, and let them know I will support their efforts when they take those risks.' "

—Brenda Hopson, Elementary Principal

"Placing more emphasis on different ways to evaluate students' progress through informal assessment helped me recognize whether or not students understood the concepts. If they could talk about it, I felt they knew it."

—Diane Carter, Teacher

"Rubric training has helped me design plans for students so that they know what is expected. They perform faster and with higher quality when they are involved in the rubric design."

—Jean Briggs, Teacher

Table 1: National Curve Equivalent (NCE) Cohort Scores from the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) Total Battery

Grade Comparisons	1994-1995	1997-1998	Gain
Grade 4 to Grade 7	35.4	42.5	7.1
Grade 5 to Grade 8	34.0	42.5	8.5
Grade 6 to Grade 9	39.0	38.9	0

Table 2: Percent of Students Scoring below the 25th National Percentile on the ITBS Total Battery

Grade Comparisons	1994-1995	1997-1998	Reduction
Grade 4 to Grade 7	54.9	28.4	26.5
Grade 5 to Grade 8	57.0	25.3	31.7
Grade 6 to Grade 9	42.2	35.8	6.4

have increased significantly. Each year, approximately 1,000 students in grades four through nine participate in the statewide assessment program.

Data presented above reflect the positive changes in student performance occurring over a three-year period. Tables one and two show students' scores as they progressed through grades four through nine. Table one represents the National Curve Equivalent scores for the same students (cohort scores). Table two reflects the percentage of students moving from the national percentile lower quartile as they progressed from fourth to ninth grades.

Educators in Quitman County School Districts feel that their progress during the past three years has been due to (1) an infusion of new ideas through numerous projects and professional development offerings, (2) collaborative efforts among schools and universities, (3) strong administrative support for teachers experimenting with innovative techniques, (4) district staff working with other schools facing similar problems to share strategies for continuous improvement around assessment, and (5) availability of new funding sources for technology integration. For students to achieve at higher levels, teachers need new knowledge and skills to continually improve their teaching in a variety of areas. Educators are juggling many professional development balls at one time as they realize that knowledge is needed in content taught as well as in cross-cutting areas like assessment methods and technology integration. In addition to the professional development offered teachers in assessment over a three year period (1996–1999), Quitman County offered teachers training in a number of other areas such as Math Teaching Strategies, Writing Across the Curriculum, Learning Styles, Project-Based Instruction, Project Read, Technology Integration, Science and Math Integration, and Accelerated Reader.

"Students are more involved and enthusiastic about doing-sharing-discovering-cooperating. Teaching is changing—I can watch my children learn and not do all the talking."

—**Pearlene Wright, Teacher**

"Students now know what it means to be a winner."

—**Roosevelt Ramsey, Principal**

"We're not where we want to be, but we're so much closer than we were three years ago."

—**Paul Scarbrough, Title I Coordinator**

Teacher Judy Bland discusses the editing process with student Adrian Johnson

Next Steps

Assessment is one piece of a comprehensive reform process. The administration and staff at each school keep the big picture in mind as they face daily challenges. SERVE continues to help district staff think through and plan for next steps and coordination of efforts that will impact their students. Currently, some issues/areas for continued growth are

- Bridging the gap between elementary and middle school
- Supporting cross-grade-level meetings
- Providing common planning schedules weekly to study the options available for facilitating vertical and horizontal articulation of the curriculum
- Involving teachers in redesigning the entire instructional process from planning curriculum to creating class schedules to organizing events for community support
- Focusing on every decision's impact on student achievement
- Thinking about changes in grading and reporting
- Training school leaders to understand the teacher-learner process
- Helping leaders know how to evaluate classroom instruction positively

In conclusion, we must change the way we think about education. We must search for more effective methods of evaluating personnel and programs. Teachers, who play an important role in what and how students learn, should explore new curriculum structures and recognize the critical role of technology in education as well as the close link of assessment to curriculum and instruction. School administrators must be able to determine what constitutes learning and become more involved with evaluating teachers who employ "hands-on" learning strategies.

Up Close and Personal

Below, Quitman County teachers Judy Bland, Bedeliah Sweargen, and Ann Goodman reflect on how classroom assessment training has helped them.

Question: Why were you willing to change your assessment strategies?

Bland: The teachers who participated in the classroom assessment training were willing to change assessment strategies for several reasons. One of the most important factors influencing their actions was the low ranking of Quitman County

students' achievement scores as compared with students from other districts across Mississippi. The teachers realized that the traditional assessments they had been using simply were not working, so they were open for suggestions and assistance.

Also, selected teachers were in the process of revising the curriculum frameworks for each major subject area. These revised frameworks are broader in scope, allowing more freedom to use a wide range of assessments. In the new Language Arts Framework, for example, suggested assessments for teachers to use with each competency are included to help teachers better assess their students.

Finally, our instructional management coordinator constantly reminds us to devise a variety of assessments. He encourages our teachers, provides us with examples, and assists us in our preparation of new methods of assessing our students.

Low test scores, training sessions, and administrative support activities have increased our awareness of the need for strategies that would help the district improve its documentation and reporting of student progress. We want to evaluate what each student knows and is able to do in a variety of situations, not just in fragmented events.

Question: Are you making progress in aligning your curriculum with your assessments?

Bland: Yes, we believe that progress is being made in aligning our assessment with the curriculum. Initially, little was accomplished in this area, but as more teachers were trained in classroom assessment and the director of curriculum worked with the teachers, the assessment "big picture" came into focus. With this focus, we could begin to align our curriculum and assessment, which has affected our overall instructional practice.

We have generated various assessments aligned with our curriculum and made a commitment to implement quality assessments as an integral component of the instructional program.

Question: What has been the impact on students?

Goodman: Assessment is ongoing and individualized. Students demonstrate their mastery of knowledge through quality performances. Alternative assessments give students the opportunity to show what they have learned in a variety of ways and to take responsibility for their learning.

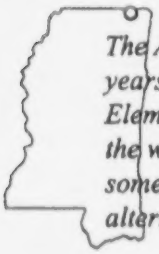
Sweargen: The students in my class were given an old assignment with a new twist: writing an autobiography. My approach was different from the traditional task of writing life stories. The students had the opportunity to write about those areas that were of great interest to them. They were to write about favorite times, favorite people, or even favorite toys. They created "Me" poems, developed the many parts of "Me" puzzles, and wrote commercials about themselves. All of these reflections were merged to form their life stories. They were given the opportunity to share their creations in small groups and with the entire class.

It was absolutely wonderful watching the students work. Each writing activity was done in steps and was assessed by a rubric that they helped to develop. Each piece of writing had its own rubric or a checklist that guided the students' work. It was even more amazing watching them check and recheck their work. The finished products were fantastic. Each student produced a short autobiography consisting of 10–15 pages of written work with various pages of illustrations and beautiful graphics. The students were extremely proud of their final drafts. They took them home, vowing to keep them forever.

Using a rubric as an assessment tool took away the tedious and time-consuming task of grading. Allowing students to help develop the rubric gave them a sense of responsibility and inclusion. They worked harder on grammar and mechanics, which made their writing better. Now, when a writing assignment is given, the common echo is "How are we going to grade it?"

Alcorn School District: Lessons Learned about Improving Assessment Capacity

Article submitted by Tim Cannon and Sandy Gibson



The Alcorn School District in Corinth, Mississippi, has been a SERVE demonstration site for four years. The goal is to help teachers build classroom assessment capacity. Rienzi and Biggersville Elementary Schools were the initial schools involved in the intensive training on assessment. Later, the work expanded to other schools. In this article, Rienzi and Biggersville staff members share some lessons learned in improving classroom assessment practices and implementing high-quality alternative methods of assessments.

Rienzi Elementary School

Rienzi School, population 180, is operated with a team approach utilizing shared decision making. The school functions according to several major principles, which Rienzi refers to as "The Five Most Important Goals of Education." These five goals are

1. To develop concepts for good character
2. To develop basic skills in reading, writing, math, speaking, and listening
3. To develop critical thinking through the use of argument and reason
4. To develop the study of aesthetics
5. To develop skills which lead to effective management of resources, property, and money

Through shared-decision making, the school has developed a philosophy, vision, and mission and has also developed long-term goals. Everyone is important and has a vital role to play in helping the school achieve its vision and mission. At the start of each year, the faculty and administration determine focus areas. For example, last year's focus areas were

- Identifying the learning style(s) of each student and developing instructional/assessment strategies that address the students' needs and preferred styles of learning
- Writing across the curriculum

Central to both of these focus areas was an emphasis on continued use of quality classroom assessment to measure student achievement and to provide meaningful feedback to students.

Rienzi emphasizes a respect for students and encourages them to be a part of the decision-making process. Students are provided the tools necessary for planning and facilitating their own learning and making responsible choices. The principal's office is always open to students to come by and share their ideas. The principal also solicits their input through individual or small group discussions and holds Principal's Luncheons on a regular basis. For a student to be eligible to participate in these special luncheons, he or she must have earned a certain number of points for reading. No more than three students are scheduled for any given luncheon. Last year, a total of 30 students attended the ten Principal's Luncheons.

Rienzi attempts to make all staff meetings more than just routine business. Anytime staff members meet, they have a learning component. Some of the topics discussed last year were brain development, positive classroom environment, learning styles, behavior as a barometer to the heart/mind, importance of positive reinforcement, students' need for love and attention, and how to make learning a joy.

Good news for Rienzi, Spring 2000 Mississippi State Assessment:

Rienzi Elementary School was number one in the state with the highest percentile scores in grades seven and eight.

Rienzi principal Tim Cannon, who regularly teaches classes in addition to his administrative duties, describes his thinking about instructional support and leadership.

"During the 1998–99 school year, my third-grade teacher was having problems instructing her students. She was teaching according to her learning style, which was analytic. However, 90 percent of her students were global and kinesthetic learners. I conduct weekly instructional conferences with all the teachers, and during my weekly conference time with the third-grade teacher, she expressed concerns as to how to approach these students. When it became apparent that discussions were not sufficient to give her a clear idea of what to do, we came upon the idea of my going into the classroom to model effective instruction for students with a global/kinesthetic learning style. Using the tale of Paul Bunyon as my subject matter, I modeled instruction so that through large-body movement, the students learned math, geography, science, nutrition, spelling, and literature. Several classes were held outside in order to accommodate particular lessons. The success of this experiment gave me the idea of using this approach to address the issue of seventh-grade students who were below grade level in reading and who were very discouraged about learning in general. The needs of these students, in addition to scheduling conflicts, led me to schedule myself as a seventh-grade literature teacher during the 1999–2000 school year. The teaching experiences in the third and seventh grades, helped me to renew my instructional skills and love for teaching. I feel the instructional practice is having positive effects on me as an instructional leader, and it also validates the instruction and guidance I give to the classroom teachers. (In other words, I was not just sitting in the ivory tower and telling them what to do; I was putting on their moccasins.)

"Because of poor reading skills, some of the seventh-grade students had not acquired a love for learning. I felt it was important for me to model the joys of learning and the thrill of investigation for them. Literature was the vehicle I chose to motivate these children. I not only wanted to capture the minds of the students but their hearts as well. I did a dramatic reading of one book, such as *Treasure Island,* every six weeks. These readings involved several methods. Sometimes I dressed as the character, changed my voice and body movements, and involved the students in the reading through discussions and asking them higher-level thinking questions. Many times the students laughed, and even the toughest boys cried while I read particular passages. One of the most memorable moments came when I finished reading Avi's *Nothing But the Truth*, our last book of the year. When the last sentence was read, all of the students spontaneously and simultaneously applauded in shocked surprise at the ending. Our school's student population and instructional staff observed these students as they were transformed into excited learners, which positively influenced their performance in other subjects. It was hard for the students to decide just which book of the year was their favorite. When I finished *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* and *Anne of Green Gables,* several students continued to read the series. They had discovered the joy of reading.

"Since the staff had elected to focus on writing skills for the 1999–2000 school year, the students and I discussed methods we could use to address this focus. We decided that the students would be responsible for putting together a notebook about each book I read to them. We used the strategy of cooperative learning to accomplish our work. One student could discuss the various passages with keen insight; however, he had problems with writing. As we worked together, I had him write what he had told me one sentence at a time. Eventually, I asked him questions and had him record his responses on a cassette tape. He listened to his responses and then wrote out his answers. Eventually, he became a confident writer and recorded his thoughts without the aid of the recorder."

The principal reflects more specifically on the role of assessment in the classroom.

"The district brings to us quality professionals who share their expertise with our staff. I feel strongly that my role as principal (and instructional leader) is to encourage and assist teachers to implement and sustain in the school setting the valuable instruction obtained through their professional development experience. Through small group settings, individual conferences, and modeling instruction, I keep current in their minds those things that have been emphasized during our district professional development sessions. We study the successes and, at the same time, stress how curriculum, instruction, and assessment must be viewed as a whole rather than separate entities.

"The quality assessment training provided by SERVE has been one of our most valuable tools, and most of our teachers have become comfortable with developing rubrics and using a variety of classroom assessments as critical elements in the teaching/learning process. Through observations of classroom instruction/assessment, I have witnessed the teachers using fewer worksheets and implementing a variety of assessments that truly capture the essence of the students' learning. Teachers are increasingly more capable of developing assessments that evaluate student performance rather than merely being fun and interesting activities. The use of quality classroom assessment has led to improvements in student achievement, helped students realize the joy of learning, removed the fear of failure and defeat, and improved teacher instruction. Quality assessment now defines our school culture because it has become so much a part of all that teachers and students do."

Cannon and his faculty believe that quality assessment in the classroom

- Forces students to use both basic and higher-level thinking skills
- Provides students with clearer understanding and direction for performance tasks
- Allows students to demonstrate learning through their preferred learning style
- Focuses teachers and students on learning expectations through the use of rubrics
- Allows students to produce quality learning criteria and set higher standards of learning for themselves
- Forces teachers to rethink what they are doing
- Improves student and teacher motivation
- Helps reduce student stress
- Encourages students to put forth more effort since they know the expectations for an assignment
- Refocuses grading practices on meeting the requirements for learning rather than on effort
- Increases student motivation for doing projects since they know the expectations and know they will receive positive feedback through the process
- Allows student choice in assessment, which increases motivation and productivity
- Creates a learning environment where teachers can work together in teams to plan, create, and improve student learning strategies
- Stresses principal leadership as key to changing classroom assessment strategies, sustaining those changes, and supporting a learning climate that stresses life-long learning as the school goal

Good news for Biggersville, Spring 2000 Mississippi State Assessment:

Biggersvilles Elementary School was number two in the state with the second highest percentile scores in grade six.

Biggersville Elementary School

When Biggersville teachers began working on classroom assessment, the staff at SERVE asked this question: Is assessment a part of your instruction?

Sandy Gibson answered, "Assessment as part of instruction? I don't think so! Assessment goes in the evaluation column in the four-step lesson planning process. It's the last step in a lesson plan. It's not considered or worried over until a decision is made on which activities are going to be done. Waiting until day seven is best before considering which test to give. What do they mean—assessment part of instruction?"

After spending the past three years working to improve her classroom assessment practices, Sandy Gibson, a teacher at Biggersville Elementary School, now believes quality assessment is central to the learning process.

Gibson believes the change has been good for her students. She states, "There has been a dramatic change in the way I instruct and assess since I've been through classroom assessment training. The change was not mandatory but voluntary for me. It quickly became evident to me that if I wanted the best for my students, I must be willing to change. Experience has taught me that when students have some control of their learning, it takes on a new level of importance. What was once old and ordinary becomes new and necessary. The outcome becomes a priority. My students exhibit confidence and motivation in everything they attempt, and I think that is due to the changes I've made in my instruction and assessment strategies."

Gibson explains how she accomplished this: "Math journals, written explanations of answers, and math projects, all graded using rubrics, create a climate for building on quality assessment. Each day after math class, my students make entries in a math journal. The students help me decide which information should be included in each day's entry. Each entry is given a point value, which is also decided upon by the students. I collect the journals at the end of the unit and assign a grade based on the scale the students help to design. All students, regardless of ability, have succeeded with this assessment method.

"Another assessment method I use is having students provide written explanations of their answers. This assessment method creates better thinkers, but it also helps students prepare for state tests. Students solve problems and write explanations for the solutions. I have had very positive feedback from this assessment strategy. Student expectations are clear, and rubrics are used to relay the expected achievement levels. The students say they get credit for what they know, rather than losing points for what they do not know.

"I've found that math projects are a wonderful tool for assessing students' knowledge. I use projects in math as much as possible. For example, my sixth-grade math class has just completed a unit of study on decimals. At the end of the unit, my students were put into groups of three or four. The students were asked to create a decimal pizza, much like the fraction pizza used to teach fractions. My students brainstormed a list of skills using decimals that could be illustrated with the pizza. We narrowed the list to include five important skills, and the students then started work. They also helped set up guidelines for grading the project, which were stricter than mine would have been. When the project was finished, I saw deliciously decorated pizzas that showed every decimal skill from place value to rounding to converting fractions to decimals. It was rewarding for me, and the students were very proud of their creations. When students in the sixth grade look forward to class time, it is safe to say that learning is taking place, and that is my number one classroom goal."

Gibson offered the following explanation of what this focus on assessment has meant for her: "Learning to use more alternative assessments successfully in the math classroom has been a long and difficult process with many successes and failures. However, using this type of assessment (performance projects, etc.) has made a tremendous difference for my students, and I value that difference. I will always use some

traditional assessments (you need all types in the classroom, like multiple choice and matching, for example), but they will never again be my primary method of assessing students' math knowledge. Learning more about quality assessment and making changes to reflect that knowledge have changed my beliefs about what is important, and I challenge all teachers (especially math) to rethink the role of classroom assessment. This assessment is more time consuming and thought provoking for the teacher, but when I read the comments my own students made about this assessment process, and when I realized that I get a truer picture of the capabilities of my students, I knew the effort had been worthwhile. What I've found out is that school is a good place in the eyes of children who are given a chance to be in control of some of their own learning."

When asked to respond about their teacher's use of alternative assessment practices, Sandy Gibson's fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade math students offered the following comments:

- Keeping a math journal and working in groups is fun.
- The assessment process is important—a single right answer or chance at a problem does not determine my grade.
- You have to do more work with this type of assessment.
- This type of assessment allows us to move around and not be stuck in a single chair, bored and sleepy.
- This type of assessment is better because you know what you are doing, and it increases your self-esteem.
- I think I learn more with this type of assessment.
- We learn more in class when we get into groups, help each other get the right answers, and show each other how we worked out the math problems.
- We are not as embarrassed to put our answers to a problem on the board when the whole team has worked out the problem.
- This type of assessment helps us learn to think for ourselves since we must do all the work.
- We learn better by doing.

When asked about more traditional types of assessment, the same students offered the following comments:

- In traditional assessment, we do not always know what we are doing.
- Traditional assessment created tons of boring homework for us.
- Traditional assessment can be confusing at times, and often we guess at the right answer.
- We can get grades every day with this type of assessment.
- We do not get an opportunity to change or correct our mistakes.
- This type of assessment is okay.
- If you miss one thing, sometimes the whole problem is incorrect.
- You don't have to think much about the problem—just write an answer.

Traditional Assessment	Alternative Assessment
Students **choose** a response **based on** given information Examples: • True/False • Multiple Choice • Matching	Students **create** a response based on given information Examples: • Essays • Open-ended Projects • Journals • Portfolios

For Spring 2000 Mississippi State Assessment: Biggersville and Rienzi Elementary Schools' percentage of students in the lowest quartile ranged from zero to thirteen percent for all grades tested in grades three through eight.

Spotlight on Assessment in Early Childhood

By Glyn Brown, Early Childhood Specialist

With the increasing demand for accountability and improved student performance, policymakers and educators have struggled to find ways to measure children's readiness when they enter school. The assessment of young children is particularly challenging. Not only do children develop differently, but their rate of growth is often uneven and episodic. This article highlights the unique difficulties in assessing children's readiness and provides information about what SERVE states are doing with regard to assessing readiness for school.

The school readiness of young children is an issue of considerable interest and debate in current educational policy. Goal One of the *National Education Goals* states that, "By the year 2000, all children will start school ready to learn." Unfortunately, the education community still has not agreed upon one definition of readiness or the best ways to assess children's readiness for school. Some educators have even questioned the usefulness of *readiness* as a concept (Pianta and Walsh). For example, some experts point out that children are ready to learn from the time they are born. According to S. J. Meisels, they need not wait until they are five years old to be ready to learn. In contrast, others cite the great variability in children's abilities as the most significant obstacle to defining readiness. That is, individual differences and variations in development suggest that there will never be a single point in time when all children attain the same level of performance. Despite these difficulties in defining the term, experts generally agree that how a child performs in school depends, at least in part, on things that happened before he or she entered kindergarten.

Today, most child development experts have begun to think of readiness as a *process* that occurs over time and that is not complete by the first day of kindergarten. Moreover, many have come to see readiness as a broader construct that incorporates all aspects of a child's life contributing to his or her ability to learn—aspects not measured by standardized tests popularly used in schools (Meisels). Still at issue, however, is the question of *how* to assess readiness and which instruments are most appropriate for that assessment.

The National Association of Education for Young Children (NAEYC) recommends the following guidelines to early childhood professionals:

All standardized tests used in early childhood programs must be reliable and valid.

Decisions that have a major impact on children should be based on multiple sources of information and should never be based on a single test score.

Administrators and teachers have a professional responsibility to evaluate critically, select carefully, and use standardized tests only for the purpose for which they are intended and for which data exists demonstrating the test's validity.

Administrators and teachers have a professional responsibility to be knowledgeable about testing and to interpret test results accurately and cautiously to parents, school personnel, and the media.

Selection of standardized tests to assess achievement and/or evaluate how well a program is meeting its goals should be based on how well a given test matches the locally determined theory, philosophy, and objectives of the specific program.

Testing of young children must be conducted by individuals who are knowledgeable about and sensitive to the developmental needs of young children and who are qualified to administer tests.

Testing of young children must recognize and be sensitive to individual diversity.

(Adapted from NAEYC Position Statement Summary: Standardized Testing of Young Children 3 Through 8 Years of Age.)

In 1987, the National Association for the Education of Young Children issued a position statement regarding the use of standardized testing in young children. According to this statement, "The purpose of testing must be to improve services for children and ensure that children benefit from their educational experiences." That is, the use of standardized testing, the selection of instruments, and how the results will be used must be based on the best interests of the individual child. Unfortunately, this has not always been the case, and many states have seen overuse and misuse of standardized tests. (See sidebar on page 25 for further recommendations.)

In an effort to capture states' practices regarding early assessment and testing, Shepard, Taylor, and Kagan conducted a survey of early childhood specialists in each of the 50 states. This survey was specifically designed to assess any changes that might be occurring in response to Goal One, performance assessments, and integrated services for children. The survey focused on three general purposes of assessment:

- Screening/identification of children
- Instructional improvement
- Accountability

Information obtained from the survey indicates that a number of states are continuing to mandate screening either as a way to identify children with special needs or to plan instruction. Shepard and others cite various problems associated with the use of screening instruments, including poor teacher training and misinterpretation of results.

With regard to instructional improvement, Shepard and others found that some states and local districts are moving to new forms of assessment that are more supportive of instruction in the early grades. This has included an increased use of portfolios, teacher observation, and what some respondents referred to as "curriculum-embedded assessment" or "authentic performance assessment." One example of an authentic assessment approach being used frequently is the *Work Sampling System* (Meisels), which is designed to assess and document children's skills, knowledge, behavior, and accomplishments across a wide range of classroom domains. It consists of three components: developmental checklists, portfolios, and summary reports, all classroom-focused and instructionally relevant.

For purposes of accountability, Shepard and others found that most states had eliminated mandated standardized testing below grade three. Unfortunately, many respondents reported that such assessments continue to occur at the district or school level for accountability reasons. Moreover, respondents report an increasing pressure to reinstate standardized testing below grade three in an effort to provide some evidence of accountability.

Currently, interest in state policies and practices surrounding early childhood assessment is high. Much of this interest has been sparked by renewed efforts to define readiness and determine, in an ongoing process, what a child knows and what he or she can do. Recently, SERVE, in collaboration with the National Center for Early Development & Learning, began a follow-up study to determine what, if any, changes had occurred in state practices since the survey conducted by Shepard, Taylor, and Kagan. To gather this information, interviews were conducted with at least one representative from each state, including members of the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education. Representatives were asked to respond to a series of questions including, "How does your state define readiness for kindergarten?" and "How does your state measure school readiness?"

Overall, results of the survey indicate that the majority of states, including SERVE states, have no formal definition of readiness other than an age of eligibility requirement. Although the date varies by state, most states allow children to enter kindergarten when they are five years old. Of the six SERVE states, Alabama and Mississippi reported that they have developed a framework or set of benchmarks to describe school readiness. Three states (Alabama, Florida, and North Carolina) reported that they conduct a statewide screening that is mandated for children entering kindergarten; however, these states do not refer to this process as "readiness testing." Three states (Florida, North Carolina, and South Carolina) currently have readiness initiatives in place, with an assessment system under development or being piloted.

In conclusion, debate and concern continue regarding young children and whether they enter school "ready to learn." This struggle is compounded by disagreement within the field regarding the definition of readiness and the challenge of assessing young children. SERVE plans to continue following the issue of school readiness by conducting a periodic review of state policies and initiatives. In addition, SERVE is developing a guide on readiness assessment for state- and district-level administrators. It will provide a review of commercially available instruments, as well as information on the purposes of assessment, how to select assessment measures, and how to use the data from readiness assessment appropriately.

If you have any questions about school readiness or would like further information about this study, please call:

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The A+ Assessment Project

By Gerry Howell

The A+ Network, in response to the expressed need of teachers and principals in A+ Schools, developed the A+ Assessment Project. The need arose from their recognition that results in schools and the effects on students of an integrated and interdisciplinary approach to teaching and learning could not be adequately documented through the standardized tests that form the basis of school accountability. With Goals 2000 funding from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, the Initiative has developed the A+ Assessment Model, which has come to be known as "enriched assessment."

The recently approved North Carolina regulations on promotion standards are focusing attention on alternate ways of assessing students and documenting their achievement. The A+ Assessment Project has focused on encouraging teachers to explore how best to do this, how to document what they discover, and how to communicate it to others, including students, fellow teachers, school administrators, and parents.

This project includes the development of three "products": the *A+ Assessment Workbook* (available upon request), the *A+ Video*, and the *A+ Field Book* (both scheduled for completion in 2001). Through workshops and professional development, the "enriched assessment" model is now being disseminated to schools that are not A+ Schools.

For more information about the North Carolina A+ Schools Network, the A+ Assessment Model, and related resources: <http://www.aplus-schools.org> or 336-722-0338.

A Creative Movement/Mathematics

By Mary Q. Penta and Joan Certa-Moore

The A+ Schools Program at Bugg Elementary

Teachers at Bugg Elementary School in Raleigh, North Carolina, created a Hexagon Quilt Movement Project using dance to help fifth-grade students understand the concept of fractional parts of a whole, which was being covered in their math class. This project was developed as a part of their work with the North Carolina A+ Schools Program. Bugg's A+ Program features daily instruction in music, dance, drama, and visual arts for all students, including those in special education. Music, dance, drama, and visual arts are also integrated into the regular classroom curriculum. Hands-on, experiential approaches to learning are used for all grade levels.

Students take North Carolina's End-of-Grade tests, but ongoing classroom assessment provides real-time feedback about student progress. Bugg began using the A+ Program as its magnet theme in 1995 and has continued to use it successfully since then. Because of extensive staff development through the A+ Program and a federal magnet grant, teachers at Bugg are very familiar with collaborative planning and arts integration. For a unique program such as theirs, Bugg teachers have also needed to develop alternative methods to assess student progress. They have participated in assessment development training with the A+ Program and with SERVE and have also noticed that when instruction and assessment are carefully planned and grounded in the curriculum, lessons are seamless—no clear boundary separates instruction and assessment. Teachers continually monitor student progress. Because much of the instruction is action oriented, teachers can more readily assess whether students are achieving or failing to achieve specific outcomes so that they can adjust instruction accordingly.

Common Threads and the Earth Quilt

Each year, faculty members at Bugg choose a schoolwide theme to help connect the K–5 core curriculum with the arts curriculum. Common Threads was the 1997–98 theme. This was especially appropriate because quilt artist Norma

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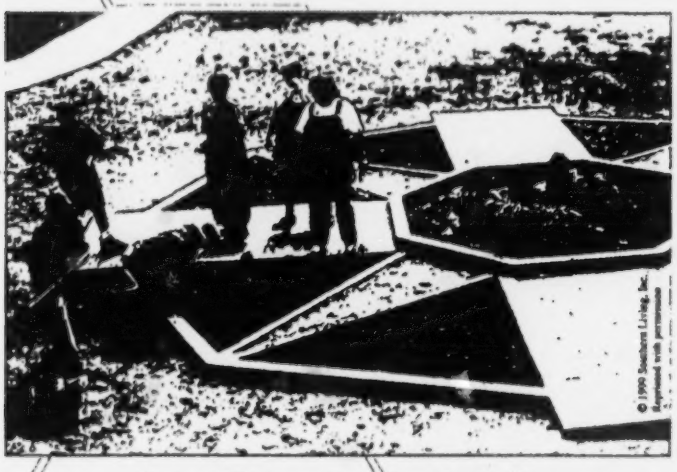
Project at Bugg Elementary School



Bugg Elementary Earth Quilt

Bradley spent four weeks in residence at Bugg in the spring of 1998. She worked with students and teachers in all grades and with many parents as well. They designed, built, planted, and dedicated an Earth Quilt. Built on a hillock overlooking the playground, the quilt is based on inner and outer octagonal shapes. The inner octagon encloses a flower and rock garden. Rectangular overlays of brick begin at four alternate edges of the inner octagon and extend just beyond the outer octagon. Elongated triangles based against the inner octagon end at the outer octagon; they alternate with the rectangles to form a four-pointed star representing dance, visual arts, music, and drama (see photo).

The Common Threads theme was apparent in the planning and collaboration of all involved. Teachers planned with artist, Norma Bradley, to develop integrated units related to the Earth Quilt. Project suggestions came from both classroom teachers and the arts and science faculty. Collaboration was also obvious in obtaining the $7,000 needed for Bradley's residency and materials for the Earth Quilt. Funds from the PTA and Bugg's general fund were used to supplement a grant awarded to teacher Michelle Burrows by the United Arts Council of Raleigh and Wake County. Parents also donated labor, supplies, and money.

The Earth Quilt Sparks a Movement Project

Traditionally, the exiting fifth-grade class at Bugg creates a permanent piece of art. Thus, the 1997–98 class had

A+ PHILOSOPHY

The A+ Schools Program is an approach to teaching and learning grounded in the belief that the arts can play a central role in how children learn. It represents a viable option for schools seeking a focus based on similar beliefs. A+ schools cover the North Carolina Standard Course of Study through interdisciplinary thematic units, combined with arts integration and hands-on, experiential learning, including daily arts instruction by arts teachers. A+ schools also develop strong partnerships with parents, area cultural resources, local colleges and universities, and the media.

The A+ approach to learning is based on Howard Gardner's extensive research on multiple intelligences and is also supported by recent brain research and other theories of intelligence. A+ schools combine interdisciplinary teaching and daily arts instruction, offering children opportunities to learn through all the ways in which they are able. The arts are taught daily to every child: drama, dance, music, and visual arts at least once each week. Teaching the required curriculum involves a many-disciplined approach, with the arts continuously woven into every aspect of a child's learning.

The North Carolina A+ Schools Program is an unusual educational reform in that it was initiated outside of state government and planned by school and school district personnel in partnership with arts professionals in the community. The program was initiated by the Kenan Institute for the Arts in 1993 and developed through an 18-month planning process across the state, funded by a partnership of public and private sponsors, among them several leading foundations and corporations including Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, The Wachovia Foundation, Inc., and Philip Morris Companies Inc. The Department of Public Instruction provided both financial and in-kind support at this early stage.

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Since its inauguration in the summer of 1995, the private sector sponsors have continued their support. The program received annual support from the North Carolina General Assembly in each of the first four years of program implementation. In the 1999–2001 North Carolina State budget, the program is included as a recurring item in the base budget. The program is recognized in North Carolina as an appropriate strategy for schools planning and implementing school reform programs under the Obey-Porter Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program.

In April 1995, 25 schools were selected from a statewide application process to undertake the A+ Schools Program and to participate in a four-year evaluation conducted by outside researchers. The evaluation concludes with the 1998–99 school year. Beginning at the end of 1999 and continuing into the year 2000, a series of final reports were published documenting the results of this evaluation. Interim reports are issued annually. Once this initial evaluation is completed, the program is designed to be fully supported through the regular budgets of the schools.

In the first three years, schools have reported improved student attendance, reduced discipline referrals, more parent involvement, and students more actively engaged in the classroom, all well-documented correlates of academic achievement. At the end of the third year, the evaluators reported improved academic achievement; A+ schools ranked higher than the state average on the 1997–98 ABC results. There were no low-performing A+ schools, compared to five the previous year. These early results indicate that among its benefits, the A+ Schools Program provides an effective way to improve academic performance, to make learning enjoyable as well as productive, to establish and strengthen the school/parent/community partnerships, and, above all, to offer children ways to learn that match the full range of their talents and intelligences. The combination of interdisciplinary teaching and daily arts instruction creates a powerful experiential learning environment for students, teachers, and parents, and appears highly effective with disadvantaged children.

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a major role in working on the Earth Quilt. This work sparked the fifth-grade Hexagon Quilt Movement Project. Fifth-grade teachers at Bugg had worked closely with the music and dance teachers on projects in the two preceding years, so they had experience in developing integrated units as well as a history of successful collaboration. Another essential component was students' familiarity and experience with dance concepts. Because most students in this group of fifth-graders had been in the A+ Program at Bugg since third grade, they had had three years of daily dance classes in addition to frequent integration of dance into classroom instruction.

In work with SERVE during the two previous school years, the dance teacher and teachers on the fifth-grade team had worked together on units that integrated core subject areas with the arts and provided ongoing assessment (see *Assessment Hotspots*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 40-50). During further work with SERVE in 1997–98, these same teachers were given the task of developing another core area/arts unit that included ongoing assessment. To fulfill this assignment, fifth-grade math teacher Deborah Burch invited Joan Certa-Moore, dance teacher, to plan and work with her and two other members of the fifth-grade team, Jennifer Fine and Mitzi Lewellyn, to integrate the math concept fractional parts of a whole with specific movement objectives.

Burch knew that her students were having difficulty understanding the concept of fractional parts of a whole. She felt that reinforcement, re-teaching, and synthesis of information would help them. Because of their success in using dance to teach other subject areas, the team decided to help students create a movement project based on fractional parts. Certa-Moore planned a demonstration for the team on effective use of movement to teach the relevant math concepts. She planned a unit that would address related requirements of the math curriculum while making use of specific aspects of the dance curriculum. The unit was shared with the rest of the team who worked with them to finalize it.

Initially, the only concrete element of the movement project was the notion of fractional parts of a whole because of its relationship to students' experience with the Earth Quilt and because the concepts were part of the fifth-grade curriculum. The team decided

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that students would be given a page containing hexagon outlines along with math manipulatives—triangle, trapezoid, and rhombus—that would fit into the hexagons. For example, using a triangle, students would develop fractional patterns within the hexagon and note that each triangle equals one-sixth of the hexagon. The team also decided that Certa-Moore and Burch would use regularly-scheduled time in math class to team teach the first session and that the rest of the sessions would be taught during dance class. Certa-Moore and her student teacher, Comstock, would introduce the project overview and then give specific instructions to students, and Burch would facilitate work with the math content. They jointly reviewed the requirement sheet that students would use to track their progress and provide feedback.

Project Overview, Weeks 1–3

Certa-Moore and Comstock, came to Burch's fifth-grade classroom and told students that they were going to develop a movement quilt using fractional parts of a whole. She said they would use a hexagon as the "whole" and divide it into fractional parts with a movement value assigned to each part. She showed them the hexagon quilt piece she had drawn on a sheet of paper and gave out copies of the movement sequence she had written for it. She then demonstrated her movement sequence set to music (Robert Een's "Even a Worm Will Turn" from the CD *Big Joe*—an abstract piece with little melody but a steady beat in eighths, allowing students' movements to be creative rather than dictated by the music). She let students know they would develop their own quilt piece and related movement sequence and then join them to create a larger quilt. She told the class that they might be invited to present their hexagon quilt in a performance at the Earth Quilt dedication.

After distributing materials (Table 1), Burch reviewed the math concepts related to fractional parts of a whole. Students used the triangle, trapezoid, and rhombus pattern blocks to begin designing their quilt pieces on the paper of hexagon outlines. As students decided which fractional values they would divide the hexagons into and chose a color to represent each value, all three teachers circulated to answer questions. The teachers assessed student work as it progressed. Most students could not complete their designs in a single 50-minute class period. Teachers collected their work to redistribute during the next dance class. The lesson was repeated with the other two fifth-grade classes.

Table One

MATERIALS GIVEN TO STUDENTS:		
Hexagon grid (page filled with hexagon outlines)	Black fine-tipped marker	Handouts including: List of seven movement options (full body movement, gesture, straight shape, curving shape, bending shape, reaching shape, level change)
Pattern blocks: triangle, trapezoid, and rhombus (math manipulatives)	Colored pencils	

Example of Certa-Moore's pattern with movement notations and demonstration of her performing the piece

Checklist of project requirements and space for student reflections

Directions: From the list of movement options, select one movement value to represent each shape—triangle, trapezoid, rhombus. Also choose a color to use when marking that shape on your sheet of hexagons. Decide a movement sequence based on the hexagon quilt you design from the shapes.

For the next two weeks, students continued to work on their quilt piece drawings and associated movements during dance class. As is often the case in units that combine subject-area content with the arts, it was necessary to use some of the flexible time built into Bugg's schedule each Friday. Students had questions about their completed paper quilt pieces and about the movement sequences they developed to portray them.

As individual students completed movement sequences based on their quilt pieces, Certa-Moore gathered them into groups of four to join their quilt pieces into a larger segment. Each group then set a sequence for the movements they would use to perform the dance that represented their segment. Because these fifth-graders, after several years in Bugg's creative arts curriculum, were completely

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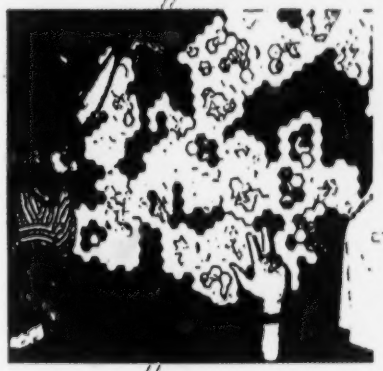
comfortable creating movement projects, they stayed on task.

Once the groups of four had selected the movement order for their segment, the teacher grouped the entire class together with a specific order for an overall performance. As their dances progressed, classes went outside to practice in the area near the Earth Quilt. In addition to being executed through movement, the overall performance was also captured and preserved by combining the students' paper hexagon segments into a quilt design for each class. These were displayed in the dance classroom.



Assessing the Project

Students used a checklist of requirements to guide their progress on the project. Teachers provided ongoing monitoring and verified completion of each requirement as it was met. Students also wrote reflections about their involvement in the project. Many of them remarked that they had enjoyed the project. However, they also said that it was difficult and had required a lot of effort.

Teachers at Bugg are in the habit of reflecting on their own practice. Certa-Moore noticed that the project seemed to energize the students, and she commented that the level of ownership was fantastic. Students who traditionally had a difficult time with the concept of part of a whole were experiencing success, and their motivation increased. She reflected further that there was a high level of success for all students. Some students who were high achievers in math, but not particularly adept at dance, performed very confidently in this unit.

When the project is implemented again, the teachers hope to create a more complex math component. A technology component might also be added, with students using computers to design their quilt pieces. Certa-Moore plans to assign peers to check each other's work.

Quilt artist Norma Bradley was pleased to see a quilt coming to life through movement. Students on the fifth-grade team were so proud of their finished product that they chose it as their performance piece to be shared at the annual schoolwide performance extravaganza held each year at Raleigh's Walnut Creek amphitheater. Additional exposure came when the staff from *Southern Living* magazine visited Bugg and photographed the Earth Quilt for an article published in the March 1999 issue.

Certa-Moore was invited to share the project at the North Carolina Dance Alliance Conference at Meredith College in September 1998. She invited five fifth-grade students to present the project with her. They shared their individual movement quilt pieces and then actually taught the process to conference participants. It was obvious that by creating the quilt pieces and synthesizing them through dance, the fifth-graders' knowledge of the math curriculum had crystallized. In addition to the fifth grade's performance of their movement sequences during the year-in-review gala at Walnut Creek, 12 fifth-graders were selected to perform during the Earth Quilt Dedication at Bugg. This event was attended by students, staff, parents, and community members.

About the Authors:

Mary Q. Penta, Ph.D., a Senior Administrator in the Wake County Public School System Evaluation and Research Department and program evaluator for the system's federal magnet grant, has served as the system's liaison for the Research and Development site with SERVE and is on the North Carolina A+ Schools Assessment Steering Committee. She worked with faculty at Bugg Elementary on alternative assessment training and development from 1995 to 1998 and has published and presented assessment development research nationally.

Joan Certa-Moore, who looks to the child as her source of inspiration, studied dance and interdisciplinary arts for Children at SUNY Brockport and Hunter College. She received her B.A. in Dance at Meredith College in 1985 and has been teaching dance in Wake County for 15 years, the last five at Bugg Elementary in Raleigh, North Carolina. Certa-Moore is heavily involved in developing and utilizing alternative assessment modalities. She is on the faculty of the Kenan Institute for the Arts and has presented at the International Magnet Conference, the SERVE Forum, and the North Carolina Dance Alliance Conference.

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The Senior Project Experience at Polk County High School, North Carolina:

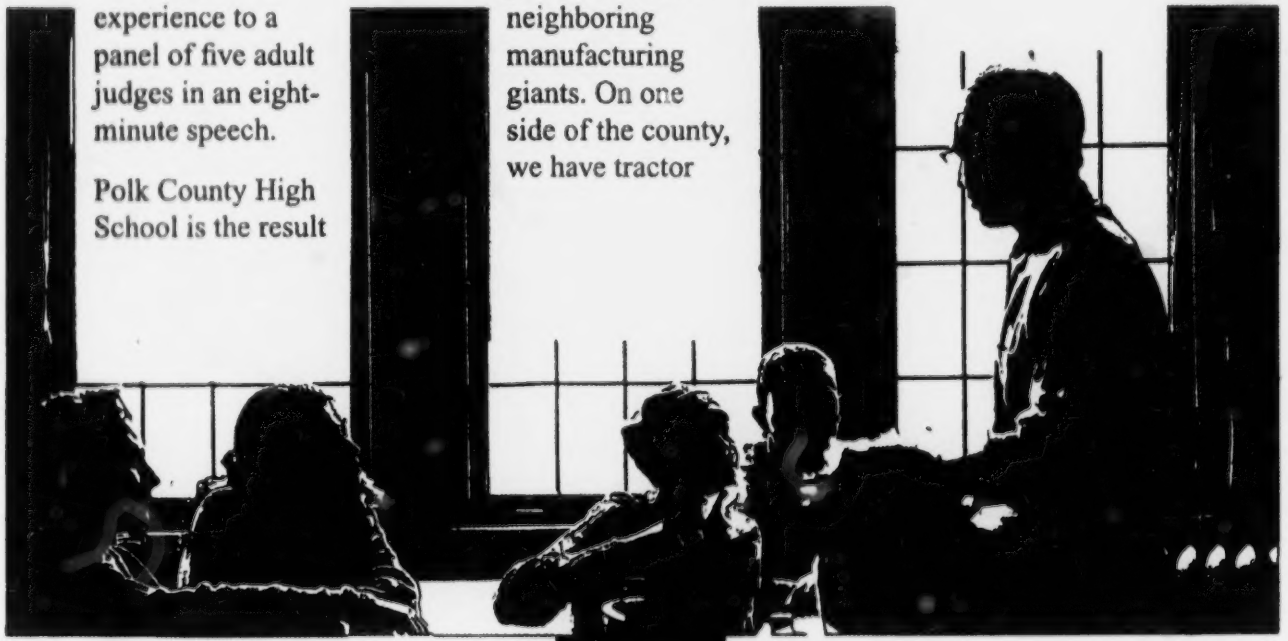
A School-Level Assessment Project to Improve Learning

By Buck Preston, English Teacher and Senior Project Coordinator

All seniors graduating from Polk County High School in western North Carolina must first successfully complete the Senior Project, a three-part program, as a requirement in their senior English class. By the end of the class, they will have written a research paper on a topic that interests them, completed a 15-hour physical project related to the paper in some way, and finally, presented the entire experience to a panel of five adult judges in an eight-minute speech.

Polk County High School is the result of the consolidation seven years ago of two small county schools in Columbus, a small community located in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Our students come from communities that are often strikingly different in interests, income, and professional backgrounds. Farming in several parts of the area is waning, while many residents leave the county each day to work at the BMW plant or at other neighboring manufacturing giants. On one side of the county, we have tractor pulls and fox hunting, while on the other, we have strongly entrenched artist enclaves.

When the two county high schools merged, we made many wrong moves, even if for all the right reasons. High on the school reform agenda were practices vaguely associated with authentic assessment: cooperative learning, use of portfolios, and the dissolution



Senior Project at SERVE

Across the region, SERVE supports educators who implement Senior Project in a variety of ways. Support includes training opportunities and yearly institutes, a video and accompanying brochure to support awareness and training activities, regular meetings for Senior Project coordinators to exchange ideas, and SERVE staff visits to school sites to view student work and collect data. A comprehensive evaluation of the Senior Project program was conducted during the 1999–2000 school year, and a Senior Project research report will be ready for dissemination in 2001. Presently more than 40 urban, rural, and suburban high schools located in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, and North Carolina participate in SERVE's Senior Project Network.

In participating schools, Senior Project is a requirement for all twelfth-graders and usually represents a significant portion of an English grade during the final year of high school. It has three components: writing a research paper on a topic of the student's choice, developing a project related to the paper, and delivering a presentation to a panel comprised of community members and school staff. Educators usually choose to participate in this program because it shows what students know and can do as they prepare to graduate from high school. Successfully completing Senior Project requires that students make evident their grasp of the central skills and knowledge; it is a culminating assessment (Sizer 226).

of a "Failing" grade in favor of an "In Progress." Teachers struggled with the meaning of such terms as "authentic" and "reform." How were they to reform their practices and create meaningful, authentic lessons if no one could define the terms? Needless to say, our well-intended experiment caved in, and our education community received criticism from parents and the media.

Nevertheless, what remained in the minds of the faculty who endured the restructuring was a fascinating vision, an idea born from what we had begun to learn about possibilities inherent in authentic assessment. If somehow we could tap into an education process that would challenge the students, get them to buy into the actual development of their education, and make them responsible for the completion of their assignments, we might approach the promised land, which we envisioned in our education classes in college.

At a time when reform fatigue was setting in, SERVE invited the faculty to attend a workshop taught by the Senior Project developers from South Medford High School in Medford, Oregon. Despite the disillusionment resulting from attempted and failed reforms, our faculty representatives recognized at once that Senior Project was the point at which our re-education as well as that of our students, our school community, and our administration should have begun. Battered as we were by community criticism, we recognized the inherent value of Senior Project. What better way to put the education of our seniors into their own hands, to make their lessons in the classroom connect to the world they would face in a matter of months, and to make their educational efforts directly related to what they think is important? We had been trying to accomplish those things all along.

Ironically, adopting a Senior Project program required far fewer adjustments to our curriculum than we first imagined. North Carolina's Standard Course of Study calls for students to write, speak, listen, think, read, and solve problems. Senior Project creates a fusion of all those often-segregated skills into one life-oriented project.

When our teachers came back from the SERVE workshop, they wanted to implement Senior Project immediately although they knew that the faculty, because of past

experiences, were wary of change. Presentation of a new idea in our situation would be as difficult as introducing escargot to a ten-year-old. We knew we had to convince our battle-weary faculty and many highly skeptical parents that this effort would succeed. The answer was born of necessity. We brought in Senior Project in stages.

The following fall, we offered Senior Project as an elective. Seven students volunteered, perhaps lured by the offer to leave campus during fourth period (we were on a four-block schedule with 90-minute periods) to complete the physical project. The students' abilities ranged from Special Ed to Merit Finalist, but their projects challenged each one, and the school began to make its way slowly toward the program we have today.

That first semester was difficult because I acted as school and community coordinator, so I was responsible for all scheduling. Even though I was the curriculum coordinator and taught only this one elective at the time, I felt pulled in many directions by the seemingly endless logistics, none of which I knew for certain would come together. I had heard all the rhetoric about how the program would begin to fly on automatic pilot after a couple of years, but that first year I didn't dare take my hands off the controls.

At first, other students who weren't sure what we were doing treated the experiment as a mere oddity. Word began to spread, however, as the first seniors displayed their projects in the hall. The following semester's elective class was almost twice as large, yet already I had begun to believe that Senior Project might not need to be offered as a stand-alone elective. As a result, the next fall, I persuaded students in my regular senior English class to complete a Senior Project in addition to their normal study of English Literature.

At the same time, we began to petition the district to include Senior Project on the school board agenda for consideration as a graduation requirement. What came out of that petition was

Senior Spotlights

Erica's Story

The physical project was a major concern for many parents at first because they believed that their children's already scarce time would be dominated by this extra demand during the senior year. Erica was a prime example. She was in my Advanced Placement English class, captain of the soccer team, and a medical assistant for the football team. Her mother objected to the burden that "jumping through one more hoop" would put on Erica. The superintendent convinced her mother to hold her objections until senior boards.

Matching students' projects to their interests became a key in addressing objections to "one more hoop." Since Erica wanted to major in sports medicine in college, she researched sports-related knee injuries and rehabilitation. Her physical project was to assist in the rehabilitation of any football player who might sustain a joint injury. During the second game of the season, the team captain tore the ligament behind his kneecap. That Erica was dating him at the time was pure coincidence, almost whimsy if there weren't a great deal of pain involved for the young man. Nevertheless, she watched the operation, and as the doctor placed the ligament on a side table during the procedure, Erica fainted and was

a compromise. For the following year, seniors had to complete all three parts of Senior Project, and those three parts would count 25 percent of the senior's total English IV grade. The "25 percent" compromise followed the logic that other courses with state mandated end-of-course tests counted those tests as 25 percent of the final grade. However, the catch to the compromise was that students might and sometimes did interpret the stipulation to mean that they were required to merely finish or complete the three parts, but the quality of their work did not matter. No standards could be set until we could say that all seniors had to "pass" all three parts of Senior Project in order to successfully complete senior English and graduate. More than two years elapsed before the Board made that leap and voted to support the "pass" (as opposed to "complete") stipulation.

On the board member's minds, of course, was fear of community backlash. Would parents sit still when their child didn't graduate because of one failed assignment? We anticipated hearing, "Do you mean my kid won't walk because he didn't talk for the whole eight minutes? I mean, how important is it to be able to talk to a group of people, anyway?" Consequently, I attended the board's reading of the issue to answer questions, many of which focused on failure rates associated with Senior Projects over the years. Happily, I was able to report that, of the seniors who had failed English, fewer than five percent had done so because of the oral presentation. In fact, the majority of those who had failed had done so because of poor work on the research paper, an assignment that had previously been a requirement in senior English.

The lightning rod of Senior Project has always been the oral presentation. Seniors dread the very idea of speaking for eight minutes to an audience of three faculty members and two adults from the community. Then, there is a five-minute question-and-answer period for extemporaneous questions from the judges. Students wonder, "What will the judges ask me? What if there is an expert on my subject on the board? What if I faint?"

The school board, parents, and students focus on the presentation to a panel of judges because public speaking is a universal fear. At the beginning of the semester, students belligerently

taken out. The nurses revived her and brought her back in to watch as the doctor finished, although she viewed the rest of the operation on the television monitor. Her project for the rest of the semester was to guide Charlie, the team captain, back to ambulatory health. Erica's mother became one of our biggest supporters of Senior Project, realizing that Erica had a genuine aptitude for her intended major. At the same time, we had learned the importance of focusing on the student's strengths and interests.

Gordon's Story

Gordon was a strong student whose inner drive made him a good writer, a dutiful student, and a willing participant in class. His was a success story I would have welcomed at any time during my 32-year teaching career. He was a quiet young man, yet he dutifully added to class discussions when he felt no one else would answer. No one suspected that his physical project, shadowing a veterinarian, would be anything less than a solid job of watching his mentor at work and reporting his findings on presentation day. The goal of his Senior Project was to study the need for animal population control.

respond, "Eight minutes? I can't talk in front of judges for eight seconds!" The power of Senior Project is that I cannot assuage students' fears until the moment boards are over. We instruct them in public speaking, personal presentation, preparation of notes, and use of audio-visual accompaniment, but they must draw on their inner resources when they approach the judges. They are alone during the presentation as they will be in college or workplace presentations. As they worry in anticipation, I can do little to relieve them of their unease. Despite the students' objections, this experience adds an element that is considered very important in the adult world.

Jennifer, one of my senior students, is an example of typical student reactions to the presentation component of Senior Project. On the day of the oral presentations, students gather in my classroom to wait for their call. In the meantime, the judges assemble in their assigned classrooms and prepare for the first interview. When the head judge calls my room and asks for the first senior, I relay the message to the expectant students who are usually pacing, muttering, and practicing their opening remarks.

The day of Jennifer's oral exam, she typified the collective mood when she was called and walked out of my room saying to no one in particular, "Senior Project is going to kill me." Fifteen minutes later, however, her demeanor had dramatically changed. The door to the classroom opened and she emerged, hands raised in victory, a broad grin on her face, and said, as many do, "I can't believe it! I did it, and I hit eight minutes before I knew it!" She was free to leave, but she didn't. Instead, she stayed in the holding room for several minutes to tell others how easy the experience turned out to be.

Senior Project's impact has reached beyond its benefit for students like Jennifer. Most dramatic at first was the reaction of the local press to what the students were doing. Many positive articles were written about unique projects and changing student attitudes. Prior to our initiating Senior Project, the horrors of consolidation and reform had been the media's focus, but now the community was treated to positive stories about our campus. They were writing about students like Jennifer and her newly discovered confidence and Joel, another senior who had seen remarkable success with building a Shaker desk.

The day before oral presentations arrived, each student had to practice "the speech" in front of the class. Gordon organized his note cards on the lectern, took a deep breath and began telling the story of his physical project. He acknowledged the importance of spaying and neutering of pets. What followed was his spellbinding account of anesthetizing his own pet, with the veterinarian's assistance, and the operation he conducted to neuter his dog. At the end of his practice speech, none of us were able to collect ourselves for several moments until Gordon smiled his signature wry grin and sat down. We all sensed, however, that Gordon had found what he had been looking for. The veterinarian had taken a chance on him, and he had found his passion.

Joel's Story

Joel's Senior Project experience possessed that startling, transforming revelation that frequently occurs with these physical projects. Joel was "motivationally challenged" as a student, and his mother vowed to do whatever was necessary to get him to graduate. He wanted to build a piece of furniture for his physical project. That was about the extent of his ambition.

Community attitudes about what was going on in the classrooms began to change, and those asked to serve as judges were able to see first-hand what was taking place in the school. Many of the judges the first year confessed to me that they were intimidated by the thought of even coming on campus. These adults were coming from a community of skeptics who felt they knew exactly what was wrong with public education.

Senior Project has become a celebration for the school community at the end of each semester. All teachers are asked to volunteer as judges on a project that interests them, and even our coaches participate except when events such as state play-offs prevent them from doing so. School board members, central office personnel, and secretaries also serve as judges, so the judging brings the entire staff together under one roof for an afternoon of authentic learning for all.

Added benefits come from faculty presence as judges. First, they gain new respect for the young speakers whose role in regular classroom settings is often as passive listeners. Second, teachers from across the curriculum have begun to realize the necessity of training our students in public speaking. Once considered an expendable part of the state's standard course of study because it was not tested on state-mandated tests, public speaking has become cross-curricular. As a result, students are arriving for their oral presentations better prepared each year.

Now that we have had a few years to watch our college-bound students and listen to their feedback, we have begun to hear that their college professors are impressed by the capability of Senior Project to prepare students for college-level assignments. Even those who struggled through the experience in high school are more comfortable with oral presentations, writing research papers, and problem solving than their college classmates from other districts.

Many of those who have not gone on to college have been able to learn about their intended occupations through the experience of Senior Project, and more than once, a judge has later contacted a student presenter to discuss job opportunities.

Senior Project offers our seniors off-campus experiences that address issues we rarely approach in class. We know the smart ones in our classes,

After a series of conferences, he and I agreed that he would write his research paper on the Shakers and how their religion helped dictate the way they approached the design of their buildings and, as it follows, their furniture. His physical project was to build a Shaker desk.

His writing of the research paper was a torturous affair, making the connection between the philosophical ramifications of the Shaker theology and how those characteristics shaped Shaker-designed objects. After many rewrites, the paper emerged scathed but complete, and Joel was ready to move on to the shop, although even in this, the spring of his senior year, he betrayed no hint of interest in or excitement for actual graduation.

Almost as an aside, several days before he had to present his project, he asked me if he should bring in his desk to use in his presentation. Knowing he would need every trick in the book to pass his boards, I told him, yes, it would be an indispensable part of getting through the eight-minute speech requirement. He needed to talk about the desk.

The next day he brought the desk and left it in a little-used room so that I would have time to see it before he showed it to anyone else. As he and I walked to that small room,

but we never have a chance to deal with their real-world abilities, except in the isolated confines of our own disciplines. As far as the challenged students are concerned, they begrudgingly do our assignments, but we rarely see what they can do, where they can shine. Senior Project, specifically the physical project requirement, lets both groups demonstrate their special skills. Indeed, these projects give a more accurate picture of what students can do in the outside world than their grades in school indicate.

At Polk County High School, we are aware that this process needs yearly re-examination. In fact, with the new requirement that all seniors pass Senior Project, we must increase our efforts to review and improve any weak areas in the program. Perhaps one of the softest elements in the three-pronged assignment lies in the mentoring of the physical project by community members. Although we do communicate with the community mentor through the student at the beginning of the mentoring process, our lines of contact are only as strong as the student is willing to establish. We may need a formal orientation for all mentors; however, an unwillingness to take up even more time of community volunteers has kept us from making that move so far.

If there were anything about the beginning of our program that I would have changed, it would be to start Senior Project earlier, before becoming embroiled in schoolwide reform efforts. When we were struggling to develop cross-curricular authentic assessments, Senior Project would have provided the best of all worlds in one comprehensive package. Hindsight cannot erase the mistakes of the past, but we can improve on the present and begin to involve underclassmen in Senior Project-like efforts that prepare them for their senior year and have them take responsibility for their own education.

If you would like further information, please contact: Dr. Paula Egelson, P.O. Box 5367, Greensboro, NC 27435, 800-755-3277, E-mail: *pegelson@serve.org*

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I remember wondering what this unmotivated kid had finally completed. In the small room was what looked like a coffin draped by a sheet. He pulled the sheet away, and there stood a stunning piece of craftsmanship in furniture. He had spent almost 60 hours and $150.00 of his own money to make this intricate teacher work desk, and I never even suspected that he had such talents.

The board that judged his presentation was an interesting group. Most of them knew Joel's history, and they had expected out of him about what I had anticipated. When he finished his presentation, he was characteristically reserved. He came out of his presentation room, said good-bye, and left. The judges came out almost immediately, and they were all in tears. They reported that Joel did read much of his research paper, and it wasn't very good, but when he pulled the sheet aside, Joel stood straight up and began to tell them about his desk. His story was the thing that Senior Project dreams are made of. At the eleventh hour, Joel had defined his worth as a student. He had demonstrated to the academic world that he deserved a diploma, not in the traditional sense, but with verve and finality that transcended what our curriculum could offer.

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An Institution of Higher Education Perspective

A Practical Classroom Assessment Course for Higher Education:

Developing a Performance-Based Course on Assessment for Use in Higher Education

By Susan Butler, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, North Carolina State University and Nancy McMunn, Senior Program Specialist, SERVE

Introduction

What must teachers know and be able to do to function effectively in the classrooms of today and tomorrow? What kind of training do they need? The answer to this question is becoming clearer as more and more educators gain experience with standards-based reform. Robert Marzano says that teachers must know how to "unpack" state, national, and district standards and translate them into meaningful learning objectives that can be communicated to students. Others believe that teachers must be able to use a wide range of assessment methods and match them to appropriate learning objectives. Arter argues that teachers must be able to develop and use performance criteria (rubrics) to better assist students in improving the quality of their work. Wiggins suggests that understanding the role of feedback is critical if student learning is to occur. If standards-based reform becomes a major factor in districts and schools, teachers need help in thinking about how to report progress on standards (Marzano). For those charged with teaching assessment to teachers in either pre-service or graduate programs, the task is to develop a meaningful course that reflects the realities of schools. However, even if teachers are exposed to a broad range of knowledge and skills related to student assessment in their pre-service or graduate programs, many find it difficult to apply what they have learned. Teachers cite the following as reasons for this inability to turn theory into practice:

> "I was told by my mentor that we don't do assessment this way at our school."

> "There is no place for me to gain advice or receive help because most of the teachers at my school have very traditional views about assessment."

> "Gee, the first year of teaching was so overwhelming, I didn't have time to put the necessary thought into my assessments. It was easier for me to teach the way I was taught, but I plan to do things differently next year."

Ultimately, the classroom teacher delivers the content, aligns assessment methods to the instructional objectives, and evaluates student performance. Teachers need the knowledge and skills to teach and assess differently. More specifically, they need experience with developing and using a variety of effective assessments aligned with state, national, or district standards. This article addresses the issue of how higher education institutions are working to better prepare teachers.

Susan Butler, an assistant professor at North Carolina State University, is a former high school teacher who participated in SERVE's assessment workshops for Bay

District Schools' teachers in 1996, so when the graduate-level teacher education program at North Carolina State underwent a revision in 1998–99, she used this opportunity to implement a new course, "Practical Classroom Assessment." The course was designed to provide prospective or veteran teachers with the information necessary to implement "quality" assessments. Quality assessment occurs when teachers review and know the intended curriculum, devise effective methods to measure achievement of the standards, and then plan for instruction that will connect the curriculum to student performance. Please note (to the right) the overall picture of such a model, where all three major components (curriculum, instruction, and assessment—CIA) must be considered:

In order to assist teachers in developing and utilizing quality assessment practices, the Practical Classroom Assessment course is divided into four major units. As students move from unit to unit, they are assisted in articulating the components of quality assessment, which can be modeled later in their own classrooms. An overview of the units is provided, with accompanying descriptions of typical student assignments within each unit.

1. Groundbreaking: Planning for Quality Assessment

Because teachers bring their own individual set of beliefs about assessment with them, the first portion of this unit focuses on the change process. Before instruction begins, participants complete a survey designed to illuminate their current beliefs about and knowledge of assessment. Then, concepts concerning both individual and systemic change are introduced. Once teachers become familiar with the change process, the focus moves to student characteristics. In this portion of the Groundbreaking unit, information on personality types, learning styles, multiple intelligences, and brain research is reviewed. Finally, participants examine teacher practices and beliefs, covering teaching strategies such as cooperative, problem-based, and hands-on learning; epistemological orientations of teachers (behaviorism versus constructivism); and metaphors for teaching (stand and deliver, sage on the stage, coach, co-learner, and others).

Participants within this portion of the course

- Complete the "Assessment Beliefs and Practices" survey
- Complete a "Social Readjustment Rating" survey, documenting the amount of their energy presently consumed by reacting to change
- Utilize sample statements to categorize teachers into "Stages of Concern" within the change process
- Solve an authentic problem related to systemic change
- Complete a personal Myers-Briggs personality profile
- Determine their learning style via the use of a Learning Styles Inventory exam
- Categorize assessments aligned with particular intelligences
- Participate in learning activities utilizing various teaching strategies
- Write reflective essays, describing their personal philosophies of teaching and metaphors for teaching

In the first unit, teachers consider their feelings about change, the special needs of their students, and their own closely held beliefs about teaching and learning.

2. Foundation: Assembling Assessment Tools

This unit is intended to raise awareness about particular assessment methods and to provide teachers with the information and skills needed to implement various assessment practices within their classrooms.

In this second unit, participants are introduced to assessment terms and to types of quality assessments. The unit defines and explains such commonly used words and phrases as *standard, benchmark, alternative assessment, authentic assessment, quality assessment,* and *evaluation.* Then, students in the course explore various assessment methods such as traditional testing, teacher observation of student work, questioning, and demonstration of student skills/knowledge-via-a performance. Next, students study particular types of performance-based assessments including

(1) constructed responses—short -answer sentences/paragraphs, diagrams/illustrations, graphic organizers, graphs/tables, matrices,
(2) products—essays, models, journals, logs, portfolios,
(3) projects—problem-based learning solutions, research presentations, exhibitions, and
(4) other types of student performances—oral presentations, dances, athletic competitions, debates, panel discussions.

In this section of the course, participants

- View collections of student work, categorize them as to type (portfolio, log, journal), and construct definitions of these assessment approaches
- Write lesson plans utilizing various teaching strategies, assessment methods, and assessment approaches
- Design ninth- to twelfth-grade student employability portfolios or capstone performance projects
- Select appropriate assessment methods and approaches to match specific assessment purposes (monitoring student achievement, planning instruction, encouraging student self-assessment, communicating with parents)
- Construct valid and reliable multiple choice questions

3. Framework: Shaping Learning with Assessment

Within the Framework unit, teachers receive an overview of curriculum development, utilize standards and benchmarks from curriculum to develop rubrics that clearly convey teacher expectations to students, and examine ways to influence student motivation through assessment.

The major theme of the third unit is the integration of assessment with curriculum and instruction. The topics covered within this theme include curriculum development (curriculum), conveying teacher expectations to students (assessment), and motivating students to learn (instruction). The first section in this unit traces the process of curriculum development from a needs assessment, through identification of curriculum "gaps," to the implementation of strategies needed to address those gaps. Then, teachers examine standards and benchmarks from a particular discipline and compare these present-day requirements to past requirements within this same discipline. Teachers also study changes that have an impact on education, such as global transitions from an industrial to an information society, the development of new technology, the market demand for cross-trained workers, and others.

Once teachers become familiar with factors that influence the curriculum, they are asked to prioritize concepts by sequencing instruction for a hypothetical one-year course. This process forces them to categorize course information in terms of "big concepts" versus "minutiae."

They also study the use of rubrics. Rubrics are scoring guidelines that articulate the criteria to be used in judging student work. If used correctly, rubrics help the teacher determine students' success in learning/utilizing the "big concepts" of a course and can also provide quality feedback on student performance that aids the teacher in individualizing instruction.

The final section within the Framework unit deals with utilizing assessment to motivate students. In this section, the use of feedback spirals is examined, and theories on motivation are explored. Teachers scrutinize the learning environment in their own classrooms and use assessment methods that incorporate student input into the decision-making process for improving learning. The emphasis in this section is on encouraging

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student autonomy and on creating a student-centered assessment program.

Sample activities from this unit include those in which participants

- Review a sample curriculum, search for "gaps" in the curriculum, and plan strategies with which to address these gaps
- Sequence a course for instruction, utilizing a one-year planning calendar
- Develop rubrics for judging various student work/performances
- Analyze teaching effectiveness utilizing assessment data
- Conduct classroom environment surveys with their students

4. Structure: Building Effective Feedback Mechanisms

In the Structure unit, feedback spirals—collecting data, reflecting upon it, formulating an action plan, implementing the plan, collecting new data—are introduced. Teachers now design a scoring guide to use in evaluating the rubrics they developed in the Framework section. This scoring guide includes criteria for judging content coverage, performance tasks, performance criteria, fairness/equity, and cost/efficiency of the teacher-developed assessments.

The course now turns to the subject of grades, giving teachers a historical perspective of grading policies and practices. This historical review is followed by information on current issues and trends in grading, including the use of alternative grading systems and an examination of "grade inflation." The class develops a set of guidelines for grading, with an emphasis on the intent or purpose of the grading system and on consistency from teacher to teacher and from school to school.

Reporting on student progress is a critical role for teachers. The class surveys the changes in report card formats over time. Within this survey, alternative reporting formats (student-led conferencing, portfolio assessment, skills checklists, etc.) are explored. The final coursework in the Structure unit concerns the political and societal issues surrounding accountability (how data on student achievement are used and the consequences of such reporting).

Within the Structure unit, participants

- Develop a critiquing guide to use in judging their own rubrics/assessments
- Utilize the critiquing guide to evaluate previously constructed rubrics/assessments
- Develop grading guidelines for a hypothetical school
- Solve an authentic problem concerning grade inflation
- Develop an alternative reporting format for a hypothetical school
- Participate in a role-playing exercise, portraying parents of children attending a "low-performing" school

Throughout the course, in addition to the assignments listed under each unit, students are expected to read text/research articles and write critical reviews of these materials. Such critical reviews contain a short summary of the content, a reflective piece describing how the content relates to past experiences, and an application piece in which the student outlines an action plan for incorporating learned concepts into his/her teaching. The culminating exercise for the course is a reflective essay in which the participants describe personal changes in beliefs or practices that have resulted from concepts encountered in "Practical Classroom Assessment." In this essay, students utilize the original surveys distributed in the Groundbreaking unit ("Assessment Beliefs and Practices") as base-line information. The purpose of this final activity is to provide students with the opportunity to write a prescriptive plan for change in assessment practices.

"Practical Classroom Assessment" is designed to provide prospective and practicing teachers with the information necessary to implement quality assessment. A central tenet of the course is the integration of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Each unit of the course has been developed to encourage teachers to reflect upon traditional assessment practices and to examine potential alterations in these practices.

Below, Butler describes her experiences in piloting the course and materials described above.

1. Why was this course needed?

Few teacher preparation programs include courses on assessment. In the past, it has been more common for prospective teachers to take "Testing" or "Measurement" courses that emphasize test validity and reliability. There has been a dearth of information in colleges of education on analyzing current assessment practices and on developing improved practices. As a result, few beginning or practicing teachers have any experience in planning for quality assessment or using such alternatives as performance, portfolio, or project assessment. Therefore, I was eager to implement a course to address the issue of quality assessment.

2. What was unique about this course? What were its key features?

One of the unique features in this course was that I utilized rubrics incorporating student input and used quality (alternative and authentic) assessment practices when evaluating student work. In this manner, I modeled the course concepts. Feedback from the students concerning my assessment methods was very positive. For example, one student wrote: "Having felt first-hand the relief of being graded by a comprehensible rubric when faced with an unknown teacher, I will endeavor to re-create that relief in my students." Other key features of the course were the utilization of relevant, authentic performance tasks and the use of problem-based learning activities in which students confronted authentic problems related to assessment.

3. What were you trying to accomplish in terms of student outcomes?

With this one course, I cannot hope for systemic, statewide change in assessment practices. I can, however, raise the assessment awareness level of teachers, get them to examine their assessment practices in light of recent research, and ask them to formulate action plans based upon quality assessment concepts. Within the course, then, I hope to provide support, information, and resources to teachers who wish to choose quality tasks, write clear and specific criteria, and design meaningful feedback mechanisms.

4. What did you learn about assessment from teaching this course?

Since my background has focused on secondary school and university-level teaching, I have had limited experience with elementary education. One of the valuable lessons I learned from several of my students is that rubrics, which work well with older students, are not as useful with young students who cannot read! It has been a challenge for me to aid elementary teachers in designing comprehensible rubrics for use with their students.

My experience in teaching this class has also re-affirmed my own beliefs about the need to convey clear expectations. Student reactions to class-designed rubrics have been overwhelmingly positive, and I have been amazed at the high-quality work the rubrics have engendered.

5. What feedback did you get from students about how they might use the knowledge and skills from the course in their teaching?

For this question, I will let the graduate students speak for themselves. They shared the following comments with me in their reflective essays:

"I found learning how to create a rubric to be very beneficial. After learning this and creating a few of my own, I came to realize I do not put enough thought into assessment before I actually assess my students. It would be helpful for both my students and myself for me to go through this process before assigning a project. This would ensure students' knowing the requirements of an assignment."

"The clapping exercise was a real eye-opener. [In this activity, participants 'perform' by clapping their hands. Some perform before criteria for 'excellent clapping' are given, some after. Some students receive feedback while others

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receive none.] I never really thought about how much information I should provide my students before they attempt an assignment. The more informed they are about my expectations and the criteria of the assignment, the better prepared they can be . . . . Students must be informed if we want them to be successful."

"Your discussion of authentic assessment stressed the need for a variety of ways to collect information on student progress . . . . Authentic assessment provides teachers with a great deal of information about student attitudes, anxieties, strengths, and weaknesses. I recently began involving my students in rubric design and discovered they are quite capable of negotiating ratings and criteria of what constitutes quality work."

6. What, if any, barriers remain to successfully preparing teachers to "assess well" in their classrooms?

As I mentioned above, I cannot truly expect to stimulate systemic change with this course. This means that I must send my students out into the "real world," which uses more traditional assessment practices. Without continued support and encouragement from me or from colleagues, my students may not even be able to sustain changes in their practices that they developed within the course. This lack of continued contact, then, is one barrier to quality assessment.

A second barrier involves the conflicting messages that teachers receive between large-scale and classroom assessment. Performance assessment is touted as an important method for the classroom, while large-scale tests use more traditional item types (multiple-choice, short-answer). Teachers feel that they must prepare students for the kinds of items found on large-scale assessments and are reluctant to utilize performance assessment in their classrooms.

Another barrier closely related to the two above involves grading practices. Even though assessment practices have begun to change and alternative, authentic methods are more common, our grading and reporting systems have not yet undergone a similar transformation. Teachers find it difficult to translate performance assessments into grades for traditional report cards. This discourages many from making alterations to their assessment practices. Teachers do have control over what constitutes a grade; however, the reporting format for that grade is still guided by district or school guidelines.

SERVE is looking for university staff interested in training or resources for this course. If you are interested, please contact Nancy McMunn at SERVE.

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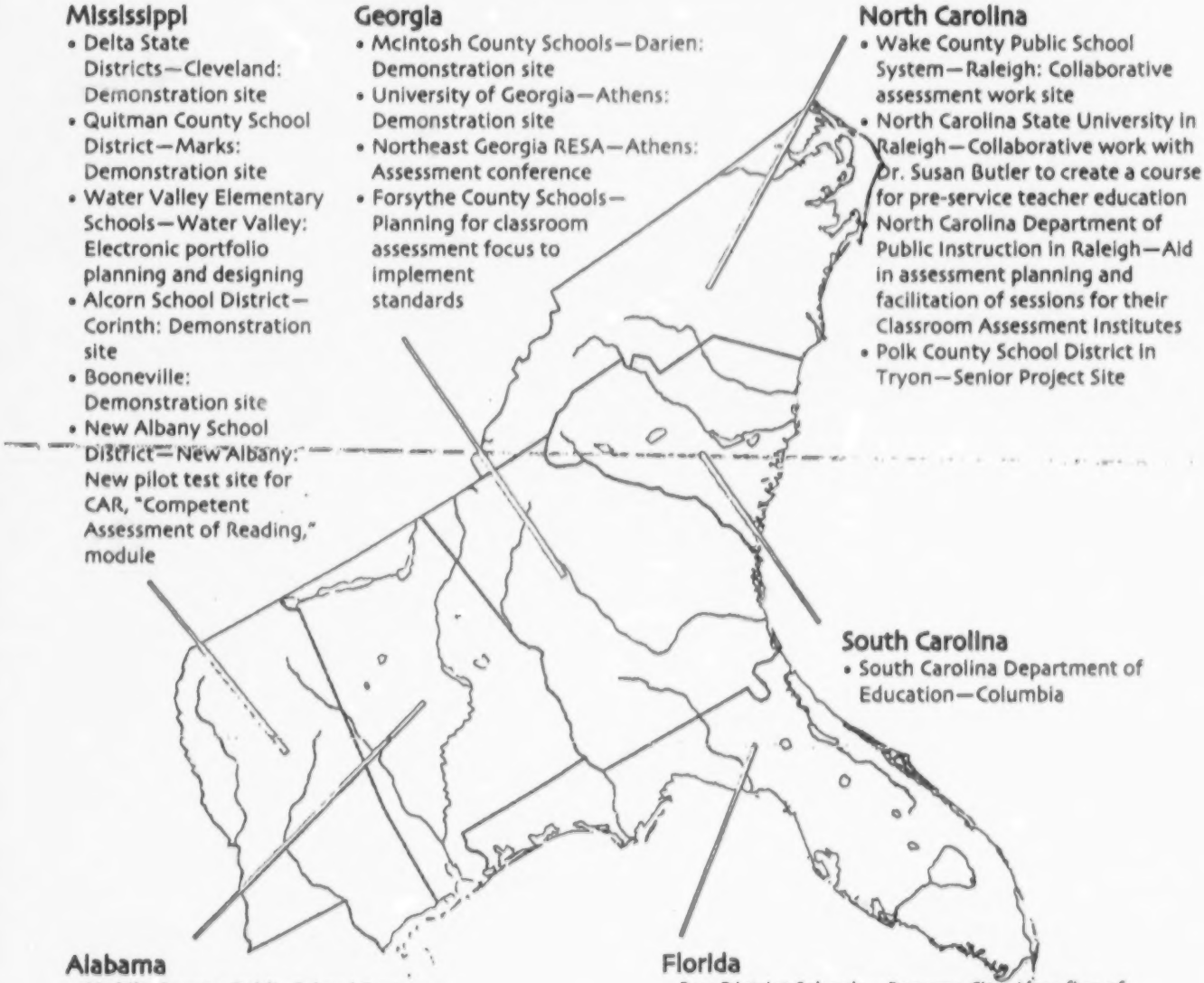
Hotspots of Assessment Activity

Activity sites—we have worked at these sites on a continual basis to help build teacher assessment capacity.



Mississippi

- Delta State Districts—Cleveland: Demonstration site
- Quitman County School District—Marks: Demonstration site
- Water Valley Elementary Schools—Water Valley: Electronic portfolio planning and designing
- Alcorn School District—Corinth: Demonstration site
- Booneville: Demonstration site
- New Albany School District—New Albany: New pilot test site for CAR, "Competent Assessment of Reading," module

Georgia

- McIntosh County Schools—Darien: Demonstration site
- University of Georgia—Athens: Demonstration site
- Northeast Georgia RESA—Athens: Assessment conference
- Forsythe County Schools—Planning for classroom assessment focus to implement standards

North Carolina

- Wake County Public School System—Raleigh: Collaborative assessment work site
- North Carolina State University in Raleigh—Collaborative work with Dr. Susan Butler to create a course for pre-service teacher education North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in Raleigh—Aid in assessment planning and facilitation of sessions for their Classroom Assessment Institutes
- Polk County School District in Tryon—Senior Project Site

South Carolina

- South Carolina Department of Education—Columbia

Alabama

- Mobile County Public School System—Mobile: Demonstration site
- Crenshaw County Schools—Luverne: Demonstration site
- Madison County School District—Assessment work building assessment teams; also, served as a field-test site for "Competent Assessment of Reading" module

Florida

- Bay District Schools—Panama City: Year five of a classroom assessment initiative and in Phase II of assessment work that includes a research study on grading, reporting, and building district assessment policy
- Anchor School Project site with Collier County School District: To facilitate the creation of an electronic proficiency portfolio for migrant students

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Brief View

Other SERVE Research and Development Projects

Competent Assessment of Reading (CAR)

A new assessment module, "Competent Assessment of Reading," will be available this fall from SERVE. This professional development tool for reading teachers links reading and assessment. The design of the module and training is intended to

- Help teachers reflect on their reading assessment strategies
- Look at the design and use of quality reading assessments
- Encourage teachers to use assessment evidence to make decisions
- Engage teachers in analyzing their actions based on results
- Help teachers rethink how they assess reading

This module fills a void for classroom teachers and is the result of a two-year study conducted by SERVE's Reading Assessment Team. Information on this product will be posted soon on the SERVE website, *www.serve.org*, in the student assessment or literacy program.

Anchor School Project

SERVE's Anchor School Project is working with the Collier County School District in Naples, Florida, to develop an electronic proficiency portfolio. The proficiency portfolio will provide greater continuity of instruction for migrant students. Information stored on the electronic portfolio will offer teachers and parents evidence of student strengths and weaknesses in four core content areas linked to standards. The portfolio's student input section will house information on interests, goals, and community and school activities.

For more information about this project, please contact Jean Williams, Beth Garriss, Jane Griffin, or Nancy McMunn at SERVE (800-755-3277).

Promising Practices in Technology Video Magazine

SERVE's research and development program is creating a video-magazine series focusing on promising practices in technology. One of the videos that will be available to educators focuses on the use of technology for student assessment. In the half-hour tape, educators and students from school districts across the region show innovative practices, including assessment that is integrated into the curriculum, electronic student portfolios, and software that analyzes students' errors and makes it easier for teachers to tailor instruction.

For more information, contact Elizabeth Byrom at SERVE (800-755-3277).

Get Published!

Submit an article on assessment for a future issue of SERVE's newsletter, *The Vision!*

Here's How

- ◇ **Submit** your **idea** and a **working title** for your article on assessment to

Nancy McMunn
Assessment, Accountability, and Standards
SERVE
P.O. Box 5367
Greensboro, NC 27435
800-755-3277
Fax 336-315-7457

- ◇ Then, submit your final draft of the accepted article. (SERVE reserves the right to edit materials for length, clarity, and accuracy.)
- ◇ Include pictures of teachers and students. (These must be accompanied by permission forms and identifying captions.)
- ◇ Consider these six questions when composing your article*:
  1. Whom do you represent (school, district, state, etc.)?
  2. Why is your assessment project important for others to know about?
  3. How was the project implemented?
  4. What was the impact?
  5. Is the project transferable to another site?
  6. What changes would you recommend?

Other Tips for Writing Magazine Articles

Use

- ◇ The "you" attitude—focusing on teachers and their point of view
- ◇ Short- to medium-length sentences
- ◇ Descriptive, visual imagery
- ◇ Adjectives and active verbs
- ◇ Comments from participants
- ◇ "Focusing event" openings

Structure your article with the following three elements:

1. **Lead**—"Hook" the reader and state the thesis.
2. **Body**—Offer evidence for proof of thesis.
3. **Conclusion**—Give summation, and end with a nice close.

*An "interpretive" article includes the facts "who," "what," "where," "when," and adds "how" and "why." A "how-to" article tells how the project was done and offers information on how it could be successfully repeated at another site.

A Self-Diagnostic Growth Plan for Classroom Assessment Fall 2000 Draft

Developed by:

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University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia

We invite your comments or feedback on this
Self-Diagnostic Growth Plan.
Please contact Nancy McMunn at SERVE
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A Self-Diagnostic Growth Plan for Classroom Assessment
Fall 2000 Draft
Direction Sheet

The Quality Classroom Assessment Process includes the use of strategies, methods, and beliefs that influence student learning. This growth plan is based on SERVE's work with various schools and districts as well as assessment research. This growth plan can be used to reflect and improve upon your own understanding of the classroom assessment process.

1. Read the following NINE Dimensions found on each page (components) or any of the dimensions you feel you need to review or work on. This growth plan can be used to improve assessment practices through a holistic approach or by one dimension at a time. Bulleted indicators follow the dimensions. These dimensions and indicators are to help you diagnose your understanding of classroom assessment while exploring and reflecting on areas of needed growth and improvement. The dimensions and indicators are not prioritized.

2. Under each dimension, check the bulleted indicators that reflect your classroom practices. If you are unsure of how an indicator looks in your classroom, or if it is NOT reflected in your current practice or needs some improvement, leave it unchecked. Be honest! This Growth Plan's purpose is to identify areas for growth.

3. Review each overall dimension again. Note the indicators you checked, and in the lower text box, write some examples of supporting evidence. These examples can be shared with others in discussions or can provide examples for you to use during a teacher evaluation process.

4. Locate the dimension with the least number of indicators checked. Review this page carefully. Then note areas that may need improvement or require assistance.

5. Think about the professional development, resources, or job-embedded training you need or want for each dimension from number four above. For example, under the Feedback Dimension, if you do not understand or use rubrics, you probably need professional development or training on the use of rubrics and other scoring guides.

6. Use your results to focus on areas of needed professional growth in assessment and note goals to work toward on your Individual Growth Plan. Discuss your growth plan with a peer. This Growth Plan can also be used at meetings to guide team or faculty dialogue.

7. Share your goals as needed with personnel who are responsible for providing professional development opportunities.

Name: Date:

Self-Diagnostic Growth Plan for Classroom Assessment

Dimension 1. What Is the BROADER Role of Classroom Assessment?	Growth Plan
What guides your classroom decision making concerning improving student learning? What beliefs or understandings do you have pertaining to student assessment? Does your classroom assessment reflect tasks that are given to students at the end of a unit or chapter study, or is it a process for growth over time toward preset targets? Current views indicate that classroom assessment is about improving student achievement based on preset learning targets that provide opportunities for higher quality learning. Review the indicators (general belief statements) below. How many of these indicators do you value as a method of promoting assessment as a powerful process in your classroom? ☑ **I believe assessment is a method of** ☐ Finding out how well students are learning (not just how well they do on tests) ☐ Promoting student and teacher interaction in critiquing work and constructing assessments so that teachers and students are partners in the learning process ☐ Gathering the information necessary to help make better decisions on teacher instruction ☐ Reflecting on what is important for students to learn ☐ Promoting thinking and understanding (not just getting a right answer) ☐ Promoting the concept that achievement is not the same as effort ☐ Clarifying and valuing significant learning ☐ Understanding that the use of quality assessment can result in quality work from students ☐ Guiding teachers and students to more appropriate and meaningful reflections on learning ☐ Promoting the ability of students to direct and monitor their own learning	After reviewing this section, my greatest needs or concerns for growth, study, and improvement are
Checkpoint: For some of the indicators (belief statements) you checked above, list concrete, specific examples to share with others or to use as a record for your teacher evaluation process. If you have no examples to share, you may not be thinking about or doing this. Do you have other beliefs that guide you in promoting assessment as part of the learning process?	

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Self-Diagnostic Growth Plan for Classroom Assessment

Dimension 2. Are the Targets/Standards for Learning a Priority?	Growth Plan
Is an effort made to consider which learning targets are important (from school and district curriculum priorities and state standards) and unpack those targets into levels for learning? Wiggins and McTighe, authors of *Understanding by Design*, state that students need only familiarization with some targets, a deeper understanding for application of others, and finally, enduring understandings for concept-driven targets. Are your learning targets considered prior to teaching and assessing student learning? Do your assessments align with the targets? Students should know where learning is headed. Do you know and share the targets with your students? ☑ **Assessing learning targets: As part of my classroom practice, I. . .** ☐ Match assessments to curriculum expectations (learning targets or standards) and instruction ☐ Include targets that go beyond knowledge and skills to include reasoning, problem solving, performances, processes, and demonstrations of habits of mind ☐ Consciously inform students about learning targets and give a clear explanation of their meaning ☐ Prioritize and articulate targets prior to teaching and learning (including knowing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating levels) ☐ Focus on the big picture by identifying the main concepts for deeper understanding ☐ Help students make connections to previous, real-life situations or future learning ☐ Dialogue with colleagues and others about what targets mean and what proficiency toward the target would represent ☐ Display the targets for learning for my students and parents and make sure all classroom and homework assignments are directly related to the purpose of the learning target ☐ Provide exemplars (examples of quality student work) as models of targeted behaviors and performances ☐ Use assessment results to monitor progress toward understanding of standards	After reviewing this section, my greatest needs or concerns for growth, study, and improvement are
Checkpoint: For some of the indicators (statements) you checked above, list concrete, specific examples to share with others or to use as a record for your teacher evaluation process. If you have no examples to share, you may not be thinking about or doing this.	

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Self-Diagnostic Growth Plan for Classroom Assessment

Dimension 3. What Are the Purposes for Assessment?	Growth Plan
Assessment has various purposes, but the primary purpose of classroom assessment is to direct and inform student learning through constructive feedback. Some of the main purposes reflect how assessment information will be used. Diagnostic, formative (monitoring), and summative assessments give a teacher different types of information about student learning. Formal and informal assessment observations help teachers know what instruction needs to be planned. Using a variety of different assessment methods helps gain fair evidence of student learning. That evidence is used to evaluate student learning and assign a grade reflecting the learning that took place. How well do you understand the purposes for assessment and use that knowledge to improve student learning? ☑ **The purpose for the assessment: I assess to. . .** ☐ Provide useful feedback to the learner on what he or she knows and can do ☐ Gain necessary information and use that information to make decisions and take actions to improve student learning ☐ Diagnose what students know and can do before instruction takes place (I use diagnostic assessments often and the information gained is used to make decisions.) ☐ Monitor students' learning and provide feedback during the continuous learning and teaching process (My students understand this process and take advantage of it to improve their learning.) ☐ Collect summative evidence of student learning (The learning that takes place is evaluated, and I assign a grade with feedback on how to improve.)	After reviewing this section, my greatest needs or concerns for growth, study, and improvement are

Checkpoint: For some of the indicators (statements) you checked above, list concrete, specific examples to share with others or to use as a record for your teacher evaluation process. If you have no examples to share, you may not be thinking about or doing this.

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Self-Diagnostic Growth Plan for Classroom Assessment

Dimension 4. Which Assessment Methods Are Used?	Growth Plan
Methods of assessment describe the means used to collect information from students. Knowing which method(s) will produce the type of information needed is important. These method(s) represent specific types of assessment tools, such as multiple-choice, performance tasks, projects, whole-group discussions, journals, logs, oral presentation, and others. Using a variety of purposeful assessment methods can lead to greater student learning. Do you think about the assessment methods you use and strive to use methods that best match your purposes? ☑ **Method(s) to assess student learning: I use. . .** ❑ Assessment methods matched to the targets for learning (Multiple choice methods might be used to assess simple knowledge; whereas, a performance task could be used to assess understanding of learning targets, such as higher order thinking skills, which are not as easily assessed by traditional methods.) ❑ A variety of purposeful assessment methods and strategies ❑ Assessments that allow students to work in a real-world context with a purpose and a specific audience, such as middle school students designing a safety book on safety awareness for five-year-olds entering kindergarten ❑ Assessment strategies that consider learning styles (concrete vs. random thinkers and multiple intelligences) ❑ Clear assessment criteria that allow my students to identify and relate to all the components of exemplary work and understand what quality work should look like ❑ Assessment instructions that are clear, appropriate, and easy to follow and understand ❑ Assessments consistent with my instructional methods (Students are taught to conduct a chorus by conducting.)	After reviewing this section, my greatest needs or concerns for growth, study, and improvement are
Checkpoint: For some of the indicators (statements) you checked above, list concrete, specific examples to share with others or to use as a record for your teacher evaluation process. If you have no examples to share, you may not be thinking about or doing this.	

Name: Date:

Self-Diagnostic Growth Plan for Classroom Assessment

Dimension 5. How Is Assessment Feedback Used?	Growth Plan
If students are to become more responsible for their own learning, a classroom process must provide them with continuous information about their progress toward preset learning targets. Giving students effective feedback is key to student improvement. Students cannot improve if they don t know where they are in terms of meeting a target. Feedback can be given in many ways. For example, conferencing with students, using rubrics or checklists, and questioning for understanding can provide powerful insights into student understanding. Any manner in which a student is given useful information to improve learning is an effective feedback process. How often do you provide students with effective feedback, and do you use this feedback to improve your instruction? ☑ **Feedback from assessment: I make a point to** ❑ Provide written or oral feedback to improve learning ❑ Give specific, frequent, timely, and useful feedback for all my students ❑ Observe students formally and informally and provide feedback from those observations to improve learning ❑ Use rubrics and anchor papers as instructional tools ❑ Use scoring guides and other measurement tools that are valid and reliable ❑ Use rubrics with distinct and clear levels to measure student performance ❑ Check for understanding regularly to monitor the effectiveness of my teaching ❑ Use practice work to provide feedback but do not include this work in summative grades ❑ Give students information to help them know where they are in learning the target and what needs to be done in order to help them reach the target ❑ Remember that providing effective feedback is part of the formative (monitoring) process ❑ Remember that a grade should not replace feedback	After reviewing this section, my greatest needs or concerns for growth, study, and improvement are

Checkpoint: For some of the indicators (statements) you checked above, list concrete, specific examples to share with others or to use as a record for your teacher evaluation process. If you have no examples to share, you may not be thinking about or doing this.

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Dimension 6. What Are Quality Assessment Considerations?	Growth Plan
Rick Stiggins suggests five keys to be considered when creating quality assessments. Some portions of these keys have been mentioned more broadly in this growth plan. The five keys to consider when creating quality assessments are (1) reflect clear and appropriate achievement targets, (2) serve a focused purpose, (3) rely on the proper method, (4) sample student achievement appropriately, and (5) eliminate bias and distortion. These considerations are important when creating and designing assessments. If we want quality assessments from our students, we must give them quality assessments to do. Do you create, modify, or use assessments of quality with your students? Do most of the assessments you use with your students reflect the indicators below? ☑ **Considerations for quality assessment: I** ☐ Provide some assessment methods (when appropriate) that allow for student choice of content or strategies for producing work ☐ Show an awareness of factors that might introduce bias when choosing a best method for assessing student learning (using items that favor a gender for example) ☐ Use modifications when appropriate for special needs students ☐ Use diagnostic and formative results as a basis for modifications to instructional strategies for individuals and groups ☐ Provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their thinking and reasoning ☐ Allow flexible time for individual differences ☐ Reassess students when an assessment was of low quality ☐ Allow a process for redoing work when evidence shows limited understanding and learning ☐ Demonstrate a general sensitivity for understanding the diverse needs of students ☐ Provide opportunities for students to engage in appropriate, real-world problem solving	After reviewing this section, my greatest needs or concerns for growth, study, and improvement are

Checkpoint: For some of the indicators (statements) you checked above, list concrete, specific examples to share with others or to use as a record for your teacher evaluation process. If you have no examples to share, you may not be thinking about or doing this.

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Dimension 7. Is Continuous Learning a Priority?	Growth Plan
Classroom assessment should complement and prepare students to do well on high-stakes testing, but at the same time it should encourage and help students value and recognize the need for lifelong learning. When the classroom focus is on learning and not just on earning a grade, a caring climate can be created where kindness, fairness, and self-responsibility can prompt student motivation to learn. Learning is influenced by the teacher s expectations for learning, especially when a teacher expects all students to achieve at a high level and provides the opportunities for all students to do well. Does your classroom support a learning process where students value the assessment process as one for continuous learning? ☑ **Learning is the priority in my classroom: I practice. . .** ❑ Sharing the criteria for all assessments with my students up front ❑ Thinking and working on strategies to help match the targets for learning with the assessment method ❑ Designing assessments that allow students/peers a guided opportunity to compare, analyze, and/or evaluate their own work (through self-assessment) ❑ Providing ample opportunities for feedback from other significant educators (I ask my peers to provide feedback on an assessment I ve developed prior to giving it to my students, or I invite parents/community members in to help assess work and prov ide students with feedback.) ❑ Inviting students into the assessment process by providing opportunities for them to create criteria and tools for their own assessment ❑ Modeling the continuous learning process (in order to grow professionally) ❑ Establishing a culture where students are motivated to learn ❑ Using assessment results with other sources of data (attendance records, previous work, large-scale assessment) to help make decisions and take actions regarding student learning ❑ Providing opportunities for students to take their learning beyond the classroom	After reviewing this section, my greatest needs or concerns for growth, study, and improvement are
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Dimension 8. Is Grading Reflective of Learning?	Growth Plan
Grading methods vary from teacher to teacher. Methods teachers use to give daily grades (or determine a final grade for achievement) include the following: (1) norm-referenced styles—student work reflects a bell-curve, (2) criteria referenced—a student's work is compared to standards, and (3) growth models—a student's work is compared with past performances. Whichever method is used, grades are only as good as the quality of the assessments used. Final grades on an assignment or for a unit of study are reflective of the instructional process used to prepare the students for the assessment. A teacher can control how grades for an assessment or course are determined and whether the process is fair and consistent and accurately reflects student achievement. Do you grade for learning? ☑ **Grading considerations: I advocate that . . .** ❑ Grades directly relate to achievement of the intended targets for learning ❑ Cooperative groups are not graded as a whole, but as individuals in a group ❑ Achievement (for a course or unit) is determined through a variety of assessment methods ❑ Student data in a grade book is recorded and used to best represent student learning ❑ Students should always know how their grades are determined ❑ Students should feel they earn a grade in my classroom (the teachers doesn t just give a grade) ❑ Final grades should be determined on preset, clearly defined grading scales ❑ Grades must be determined in a fair, appropriate, and justifiable way. ❑ Grading methods in my classroom are analyzed and reflected upon frequently, utilizing feedback from students and parents to determine if the method is fair, appropriate, and justifiable ❑ Dialogue with other teachers on grading issues is sought ❑ Grades for extra credit reflect learning, not just extra effort	After reviewing this section, my greatest needs or concerns for growth, study, and improvement are

Checkpoint: For some of the indicators (statements) you checked above, list concrete, specific examples to share with others or to use as a record for your teacher evaluation process. If you have no examples to share, you may not be thinking about or doing this.

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Dimension 9. How Is Achievement Communicated?	Growth Plan
Documenting and communicating student achievement should be an ongoing effort. However, most communication with parents takes place at the end of a learning cycle. Communication should be clearly planned and ongoing while reflecting progress, achievement, or expectations for learning. Some of the best communication processes involve an interactive dialogue among the teacher, parent, and student. Communicating with parents through report cards limits what a teacher can share about student learning. Often a report card format is restrictive and guided by districtwide requirements that might not give a clear understanding of the learning and how it was measured. Even though a report card is required, students can still be part of the evaluation and reporting process through various communication means. How do you communicate with parents and students to improve learning? How do you involve your students in the evaluation and reporting process? ☑ Communicating results is important: I help students understand their learning by . . . ❑ Providing time for interviews, conferences, and discussions with students and parents to review work ❑ Providing evidence of student learning in an organized system that goes beyond a report card format (portfolios, Friday folders, or other tools to house evidence of student work) ❑ Using a variety of quality assessment results to form a final grade utilizing a consistent and justifiable evaluation process that makes sense to students and parents (A mechanism is in place to share with parents the kinds of assessments used—projects, multiple-choice tests, etc.—to determine a student grade and how the grade was calculated. This could also show how well a student does on specific assessments.) ❑ Enriching grade reports with additional, meaningful details ❑ Providing a means for students to evaluate and reflect upon their individual achievement and progress (For example, some teachers use portfolios to house evidence of student learning and often ask students to reflect upon their work samples or set goals for improving their learning.)	After reviewing this section, my greatest needs or concerns for growth, study, and improvement are
Checkpoint: For some of the indicators (statements) you checked above, list concrete, specific examples to share with others or to use as a record for your teacher evaluation process. If you have no examples to share, you may not be thinking about or doing this.	

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